PETE WILSON'S RECORD—THE FLIP SIDE

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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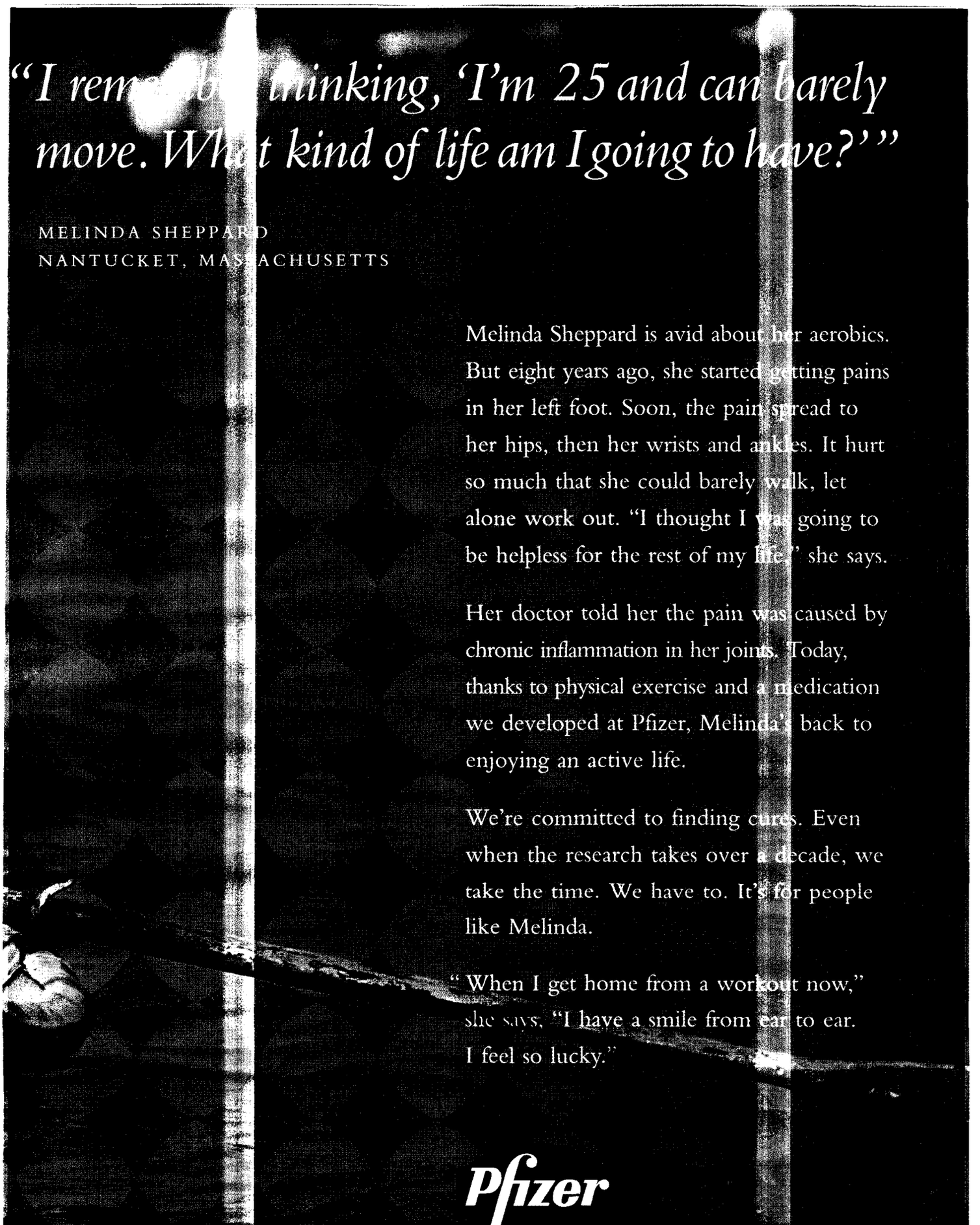

"I remember thinking, 'I'm 25 and can barely move. What kind of life am I going to have?'"

MELINDA SHEPPARD
NANTUCKET, MASSACHUSETTS

Melinda Sheppard is avid about her aerobics. But eight years ago, she started getting pains in her left foot. Soon, the pain spread to her hips, then her wrists and ankles. It hurt so much that she could barely walk, let alone work out. "I thought I was going to be helpless for the rest of my life," she says.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Into the wilderness

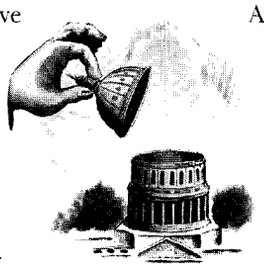
You wouldn't know it from the standing-room-only crowds that packed the Washington Hilton for the Christian Coalition's annual conference last week, but there are severe limits to what the coalition, and more broadly the Christian right, can accomplish politically. These limits become apparent whenever the religious right begins to win power, and not merely wield influence, in cities and states. Look at what has happened recently in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

Merrimack is a sleepy suburban town (pop. 22,000) just north of Nashua. It's part of southern New Hampshire's "Golden Triangle," which prospered during the '80s from the growth of computer and telecommunications firms. Its high schools have one of the highest graduation rates—78 percent—in the state. In the May 1994 school board election, however, Shelly Uscinski, a volunteer for Pat Buchanan in 1992 and the president of the Republican women's club, defeated incumbent board chairman Ken Coleman by three votes. Uscinski's campaign literature stressed her support for "improving the quality of education," but in a low-turnout campaign, she benefited from the support of the town's two fundamentalist ministers who opposed the introduction of an AIDS curriculum, and from mailings from conservative taxpayer groups.

Once in office, Uscinski joined forces with two recently elected council members, Chris Ager and Virginia Twardosky, to advance the agenda of the religious right. The three of them, forming a "majority bloc" on the five-member board, pushed through a moment of silent prayer, tossed out the schools' health curriculum and banned Planned Parenthood literature. They also rejected a plan for an interdisciplinary school-within-the-school on the dubious grounds that it was "outcome-based education," a charge that has become a religious right shibboleth. When I asked Uscinski to explain what outcome-based education is, she said, "It is very difficult to explain. It is getting away from academics, listening to your attitudes and feelings."

Coleman and the board minority immediately accused Uscinski, Twardosky and Ager of doing the Christian Coalition's bidding, but the three denied belonging to the organization. That was undoubtedly true. Like many religious conservatives, they had been fellow-travelers rather than dues-paying members. But in September of 1994, the coalition paid Uscinski's expenses to address last year's "Road to Victory" conference in Washington, where, she said, she was "in Republican heaven." Afterwards, she joined the coalition, and both she and Twardosky began attending strategy meetings.

Uscinski's involvement with the Christian Coalition infuriated her opponents, but, like the proposal for a moment of silence, it might have passed unnoticed in Merrimack. In January, however, Fundamentalist minister Paul Norwalt, who had backed Uscinski and Twardosky's election, proposed that Merrimack schools include teaching of creationism in their science curriculum. The two women both defended Norwalt. Twardosky told *The Boston Globe*, "If you're only going to teach evolution, then your God is King Kong. I'm sorry—my children and grandchildren did not come from apes."



More than 200 people packed the school board meeting to protest Norwalt's creationism plan. One Merrimack parent's response was typical. "It's ludicrous," she said. "They cut money for computers and yet they're considering creationism." When even more parents showed up the next month, the majority bloc passed a resolution limiting debate on council proposals to the last fifteen minutes of meetings and tabled Norwalt's proposal until after the May school board election. But the election proved a disaster. With 4,086 citizens voting, 1,000 more than ever before, Coleman and one of the minority incumbents won the two open seats with a 1,500-vote margin over their religious-right opponents.

In July, Ager unveiled a proposal, adapted from religious right efforts in Texas and California, forbidding teachers from presenting homosexuality "in a positive light" and counselors from referring gay students to homosexual organizations. Coleman tried to introduce a substitute resolution that forbade the district from "promoting" homosexuality, but the board's majority insisted on its broader wording.

The majority's anti-gay stance had some appeal, but the controversy confirmed growing fears that Merrimack was becoming what one resident called a "gooberville in Arkansas." Ager, Uscinski and Twardosky are probably finished. Says Coleman, "My appraisal is that these people couldn't get re-elected if they were giving out $100 bills to everybody." They even face problems with their most devoted followers. "I was completely ignored," Norwalt said. "I have chosen to start my own school, where I can teach the truth."

The events in Merrimack show that when religious conservatives push not merely token reforms like a moment of silence (which the sincerely devout recognize as a canard), but proposals that contain explicit religious content, they are likely to be repudiated. And Merrimack, which is similar to suburban communities in New Jersey, Virginia and Massachusetts, is typical of the new America. Its voters are more Republican than Democrat, but they support Bill Weld and Christie Whitman rather than Ollie North and Pat Buchanan. If the religious right can't win in Merrimack, it won't ever be able to set the nation's agenda.

Merrimack also demonstrates the dilemma that the religious right faces as a sectarian movement. As Coalition Director Ralph Reed understands, it can succeed publicly as long as it couches its religious concerns in popular, universal terms and supports Republicans such as Bob Dole or Phil Gramm. Reed has been leery of identifying the coalition with Buchanan, even though many of the coalition's rank-and-file back him. But when the coalition pursues a path of milquetoast reform, it risks alienating Norwalt and its most fanatic followers. Without the fundamentalist ministers and their churches, the Christian Coalition would become just another direct-mail-financed letterhead organization.

More important, the imbroglio in New Hampshire testifies to the Christian right's scant contribution to American education. Ager, Uscinski and Twardosky all pledged to improve the quality of education in Merrimack, but they did precious little to change what actually goes on in classrooms. Instead, they have embroiled the school board in sterile controversies about school prayer, quackery and homosexuality. In Merrimack and elsewhere, parents have real worries about how schools are preparing their children for an economy and society that stresses skills and concepts that didn't exist two decades ago. The Christian right appears to be the last group in America equipped to address those concerns.

JOHN B. JUDIS

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CORRESPONDENCE

Bad choice

To the editors:

I don't know what's more surprising—that Jerry Z. Muller ("The Conservative Case for Abortion," August 21 & 28) tries to sell a paraphrase of Margaret Sanger as a clever '90s solution to the abortion controversy or that he implicitly invokes her as an object worthy of conservatives' adulation. The mother of Planned Parenthood, who throughout her career associated with various groups of racists and eugenicists, would have been very comfortable (and familiar) with appeals to societal stability and with the proposition that the poor and "unfit" should have fewer offspring. However, there are some things more important to many of the real-life conservatives Muller would like to convert than his admittedly upper-middle-class vision of stability—justice and the necessity of defending the defenseless, to name a couple.

JAMES B. LAGRAND
Bloomington, Indiana

To the editors:

Jerry Z. Muller's argument for abortion was provocative and, for the most part, welcome. Unfortunately, by calling it "conservative," Muller was more than a little misleading. It is true that his position is anti-liberal, but it would be more appropriate to call his argument communitarian than conservative.

Muller correctly points out that the current debate over abortion centers on "rival interpretations of individual rights." In contrast to those individualistic arguments, he establishes a position based on "the social function of the family over the rights of the individual." Muller, therefore, pits variations of the classical liberal approach (emphasizing individual rights) against a communitarian one (focusing on social functionalism).

What Muller ignores is the fact that, just as there are multiple views of liberalism, there are competing perspectives within communitarianism. Muller, whether purposively or not, has co-opted the entire communitarian cause under the mantle of conservatism. To make this faulty move complete, he employs such tactics as incorrectly calling Iris Young a "liberal feminist." He has either not read Young's work or has not read it well, for her pluralist approach to group-based oppression makes her much more communitarian than liberal. By referring to her as a liberal, however, Muller hopes to dismiss the possible existence of a non-conservative communitarianism.

Those of us with any tendency toward progressive communitarianism ought not let those like Muller (e.g. Bill Bennett) categorize our principles as "conservative."

STEPHEN K. MEDVIC
West Lafayette, Indiana

Chip in

To the editors:

Cass R. Sunstein's terrific review of *Abandoned in the Wasteland* by Newton N. Minow and Craig L. LaMay ("Selling Children," August 21 & 28) requires one correction. Sunstein says that, V-chip aside, none of Minow and LaMay's proposals to improve the quality of children's television is likely "to get serious attention in Washington, now or soon." In fact, the Federal Communications Commission is seeking comment on a plan much like one of Minow and LaMay's central reforms: requiring broadcasters to generate a minimum amount of children's educational programming each week (say, three hours rising to five). Comments are due this month and interested parties can weigh in by e-mail at KIDSTV@FCC.GOV.

JULIUS GENACHOWSKI
Counsel to FCC Chairman
Reed E. Hundt
Washington, D.C.

Capital punishment

To the editors:

Michael Lind ("Smothering Oaks," August 21 & 28) attacks the alleged inequality in the distribution of wealth in America by suggesting that the United States "taxes only wealth in the form of inheritance and capital gains" and by further claiming that most democracies tax capital as well as income.

For taxpayers in the highest brackets, U.S. income taxes are indeed taxes on capital for the simple reason that the untaxed portion of income, less living expenses, is an increment to capital. Thus, taxes on income and estates must be integrated in viewing how the "super-rich" fare in our system. And they don't fare so well. A taxpayer in the highest brackets in a high-tax state pays about 43 percent of his income to federal and state taxes. Of the remaining 57 percent, estate taxes then take 60 percent, leaving heirs (after the interspousal transfer) with slightly more than 23 percent of the wealth he has created. Thus, the highest-bracket taxpayers or their heirs pay about 80 percent of the wealth created by their income to taxes, hardly a benign result.

American "super-rich" taxpayers would love to be taxed at Swiss rates, including the capital levy which Lind espouses with such enthusiasm. A quick comparison of how high-bracket taxpayers would fare in each country demonstrates this quite clearly. Assume a taxpayer with $25 million in capital and an annual adjusted gross income of $1 million. In the United States he would pay about $420,000 in federal and state taxes after adjusting for the federal credit for state income taxes. After the interspousal transfer, $15 million would go for estate taxes, even if he left all his money to his children.

Switzerland, unlike the United States, favors the transfer of capital at death to one's descendants by lower estate taxes. Thus, the same taxpayer would pay a federal income tax of $115,000, a cantonal income tax (varying from canton to canton) in Zurich of $140,000, for a total income tax bill of $255,000. The cantonal tax for wealth in Zurich is .3 percent, or $75,000, making the total tax bill $330,000, including the wealth tax, as against $420,000 in the United States.

It is in estate taxes that Switzerland shows its favorable disposition towards intra-family inheritance. Under Swiss law, as is the case in the United States, property passing to the descendant's spouse is fully exempt from inheritance tax. If a decedent leaves his estate to his parents or his descendants in Switzerland, the highest bracket is a 6 percent tax, only one-tenth of the comparable U.S. estate tax bracket.

Whereas the heirs of a U.S. taxpayer are left with about 20 percent of the capital generated by his lifetime income, after a death Swiss heirs are left with 63 percent, even after a capital levy has taken its annual bite. While these calculation are at the margins and ignore bracket creep, they most clearly explode the hollow nature of Lind's claims that "super-rich" U.S. taxpayers need Swiss tax treatment to restore wealth equality. Quite to the contrary, present U.S. income and estate taxes are destroying fortunes quite handily. Indeed, we could all do with a bit of Swiss tax policy.

GEORGE H. HEYMAN JR.
New York, New York

To the editors:

Michael Lind points out that current conservative rhetoric identifies the "American dream not with being born rich" but with "making one's own fortune." Well, if Bill Gates is the conservatives' best example of meritocracy, then we're in a lot of trouble. Bill was born into a wealthy Seattle family, his father was a leading lawyer, his mother was heavily involved in University of Washington affairs. Bill attended an exclusive local private school, Lakeside, before heading off to

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Harvard. The story goes that he had a $1 million endowment from his father.

To his credit, Bill apparently never used his endowment to start Microsoft, preferring instead to "go it alone." In view of his family background, I would never accuse Bill Gates of being a worthy candidate for meritocracy poster boy.

RICHARD HUFFMAN
Lake Forest Park, Washington

Apocalypse no

To the editors:

Your editorial on Waco ("Apocalypse Now," August 21 & 28) contains a number of misstatements about how the Treasury Department responded to this tragedy. The Treasury Department and independent panels—on which no one from ATF served—conducted the review of ATF's actions at Waco. Those panels included thirteen individuals from outside the federal government who gave their time to analyze this incident.

Their review—which two years ago detailed the errors in planning, management and judgment—certainly did not "exonerate" ATF, as you suggest. After the review's release, the field commanders lost their badges and guns; the agency's leadership was replaced. Moreover, this 500-page report became mandatory reading for all new agents and was shared with other law enforcement agencies so all could benefit from the tragic lessons learned by ATF. In no sense did the administration "refuse to consider critically" ATF's actions or the changes required to prevent future tragedies. Treasury and ATF officials answered questions about Waco from four different congressional committees during eight days of hearings in 1993.

The report did praise ATF for investigating Koresh, and for good reason. We now know that the Davidians illegally possessed at least four dozen fully automatic weapons and countless grenades and explosives. Even the Davidians' attorneys, both at trial and in the recent hearings, did not challenge whether ATF had probable cause to investigate federal firearms violations at the compound. Secretary Robert Rubin made all of this clear in the letter he sent to the press on July 5. And no new material facts concerning ATF's actions at Waco emerged during the ten days of hearings.

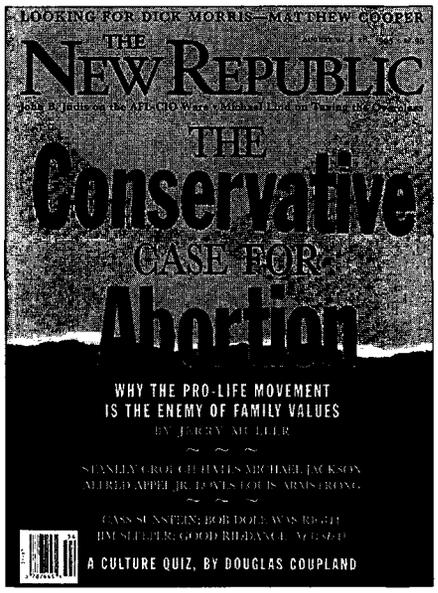
So your response to Rubin's letter disappoints me. You expressed surprise that he should warn that some would try to use the hearings to undermine law enforcement. But with the recent rhetorical attacks and physical threats directed at ATF agents, such a warning was appropriate and, as it happens, prescient. We have learned that representatives from the National Rifle Association, which chooses to call the men and women of ATF "jackbooted thugs," surreptitiously assisted the congressional investigation.

Well-meaning individuals made mistakes at Waco, but let's remember that the Treasury Department and outside reviewers first told the public of those mistakes two years ago and that corrective actions have been taken to ensure they're not repeated.

RONALD K. NOBLE
Undersecretary for Enforcement,
Treasury Department
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

There is, indeed, a fine line between clever and stupid. Fortunately for TNR readers, the collaborators on "Apocalypse Now"—not the twisted three-hour Vietnam flick but the infinitely more tedious and incoherent editorial—made that line clearer by crossing over to the stupid with comforting regularity. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin did not say, as you imply, that Waco cannot be understood properly outside the context of Oklahoma City. He said—and all you had to do was read the quote you printed—*the hearings* on Waco cannot be understood properly outside the context of Oklahoma City, and he's right. What Oklahoma City showed us—not the bombing itself but the aftermath, the sudden hand-wringing over ATF abuses, the militia leaders coddled and haloed and paraded in front of Congress in full battle fatigues—is precisely what Waco shows us, that no matter how utterly nutso and destructive you are, as long as you're a right-wing radical Bible-thumping gun-loving military-type nutso you'll get instantaneous respect. In short, you'll be listened to. Does anyone recall House and Senate "M.O.V.E." hearings after their state-sponsored incineration? The debate in the Waco hearings is, astonishingly, being driven by the lumpish paranoia of the murderers. No longer is David Koresh to blame for raping 16-year-olds (this fact was conspicuously left out of your editorial), for accumulating hundreds of firearms and explosives, for finally cremating dozens of people. It wasn't Koresh, according to you, but Bill Clinton who "acted coarsely and thoughtlessly and lethally." What choice did Koresh have, your editorial seems to say, Bill Clinton just didn't give him enough leeway, Janet Reno just doesn't know the difference between "stockpiling" weapons and (your incomprehensible spin) "trading them." (Why the thousands of rounds of ammunition then? Was Koresh simply "demonstrating the weapon's capability" to some unwitting potential buyers in ATF gear?) And you have the gall to accuse others of being "apologists"?


LOOKING FOR DICK MORRIS—MATTHEW COOPER
THE NEW REPUBLIC
THE Conservative CASE FOR Abortion
WHY THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT IS THE ENEMY OF FAMILY VALUES
BY JERRY MULLER
A CULTURE QUIZ, BY DOUGLAS COUPLAND

In this light, any fanatic lurch to the right, any violent demonstration of (again your utterly unbelievable phrase) "virulent populism" can be explained away by blaming the victim. Where was TNR when Jim Jones and Charles Manson needed you?

ERIC PLATTNER
Findlay, Ohio

Autopsy

To the editors:

Jim Sleeper's predictably graceless dancing on *New York Newsday*'s grave ("*NYN* RIP," August 21 & 28) tells us far more about him than about the economic stupidity of Times Mirror's new chairman, Mark Willes, in precipitously shutting the paper.

Sleeper's tedious obsession with what he sees as *NYN*'s "dreamy multiculturalism" and "volatile mix of class-based liberalism and race-and-gender discourse" merely reflects his own bias that minority reporters—at least those who don't want to be white—must be less qualified.

New York Newsday did not die because of its journalism. It died because Willes wanted to distract attention from lowered earnings reports and to spark a short-term boost in the price of the stock, which he has done to the benefit of the 401K funds we are taking to new jobs or the unemployment line. Willes, a former General Mills official, explained his approach to newspapers by saying that Hispanics buy Cheerios instead of a less-costly generic brand because its bright yellow box makes them feel part of the mainstream. It appears that Willes is Sleeper's kind of guy.

BOB LIFF
New York, New York

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

OCTOBER 2, 1995

51-49

In the first issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC, which appeared not long after the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian emperor by a Serb radical in Sarajevo, Rebecca West, a formidable student of the Balkans, wrote about the need for "an unsurprisable mind." She was not writing about the Balkans, but the recent history of the wretched region, and of American policy toward it, has made unsurprisability even more urgent, and even more remote. The surprises just won't stop. We were surprised when the Clinton administration did nothing. Then we were surprised when the Clinton administration did something. Now we are surprised by the something that the Clinton administration did.

Operation Deliberate Force, the NATO assault on strategic targets of the Bosnian Serbs, for the purpose of relieving the sadistic siege of Sarajevo and persuading the Serbs to exchange war for diplomacy, was a reversal of American policy. It looked like the end of appeasement. But strange things are happening, or not happening, on the ground. "NATO is operating with one hand tied," a senior U.N. military officer told *The Washington Post*. The magnitude of the NATO action appears to be seriously limited. Many significant Serb assets, including heavily armed front-line units, have been kept off the NATO target list. The reason for this inhibition of force is not only an anxiety about civilian casualties. There is another reason, grimly reminiscent of the Western prevarications of the recent past. As the *Post* reported, "NATO has specifically placed those targets off-limits so as not to be seen as trying to strategically affect the outcome of the war." The largest operation in NATO's history, and it is not to change the balance of power! No wonder the Bosnian Serbs are defiant. "If I were Mladic," that same U.N. officer said, "I would resist to the last."

And even stranger things are happening at the bargaining table. The NATO campaign was designed to produce a diplomatic breakthrough, and it did. On September 8, it was announced in Geneva that the parties to the conflict had accepted a plan that will create a Serbian republic, already named Republica Srpska, on 49 percent of the territory of Bosnia. The armed intervention that was supposed to bring the aggressors to heel, in short, has brought them a new state; and the idea that the new Serb state will not affiliate with the old Serb state, and together realize substantially the dream of a Greater Serbia, is absurd. It is absurd not least because the remaining 51 percent of Bosnia is expressly allied to Croatia. And then the plan becomes truly mysterious. It declares that Serbia and Croatia agree to recognize the existence of Bosnia, and also that Bosnia will retain its seat at the United Nations. But what sort of sovereignty is it that obtains for only half of a country that is confederated with another, more powerful country?

This 51-49 formula has always been rather offensive. Is there anybody who does not see that 51-49 is 50-50 diluted by a little meaningless symbolism, that the Serbs are being rewarded with half of Bosnia for their attempt to conquer all of Bosnia? (It is also a very American formula, in the way that Americans like to sell goods that cost $100 for $99.99.) But there is something even more offensive about the new plan. It is premised on the acceptability of ethnic cleansing; or more precisely, it aims to transform ethnic cleansing from an instrument of war into an instrument of peace. A Faustian plan, if ever there was one.

The quasi-legitimation of ethnic cleansing as a condition of diplomacy began in August, with the Croatian seizure of Krajina and the subsequent expulsion of Serbs from the region. A poetic injustice, but an injustice all the same: this, too, was ethnic cleansing. But the American government was reluctant to condemn the atrocities of the Croatians. It had a use for them. Richard Holbrooke, a restless and intelligent man with an eye for the main chance, explained to his superiors that the ethnic segregation of the region may be ugly, but it makes possible the conflation of political boundaries with ethnic boundaries. Suddenly the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa to the Bosnian Serbs in the east fell into place with the fall of the Krajina to the Croatians in the west. "We ought to use it to our advantage," Warren Christopher said of the Balkanization of the Balkans, "or capitalize on it."

We do not doubt that the war in the Balkans must end with a partition of Bosnia. But why 51-49? And we understand that a peace based on the principle of pluralism may be asking too much. But why a peace based on the principle of racial purity? (It is worth remembering that 50,000 Serbs stayed in Sarajevo to tough it out with 200,000 Bosnians.) A part of the answer, of course, is that the United States wants a quick fix. The president is running for president. But he is also running the country that exemplifies for the world the essential connection between multi-ethnicity and decency. •

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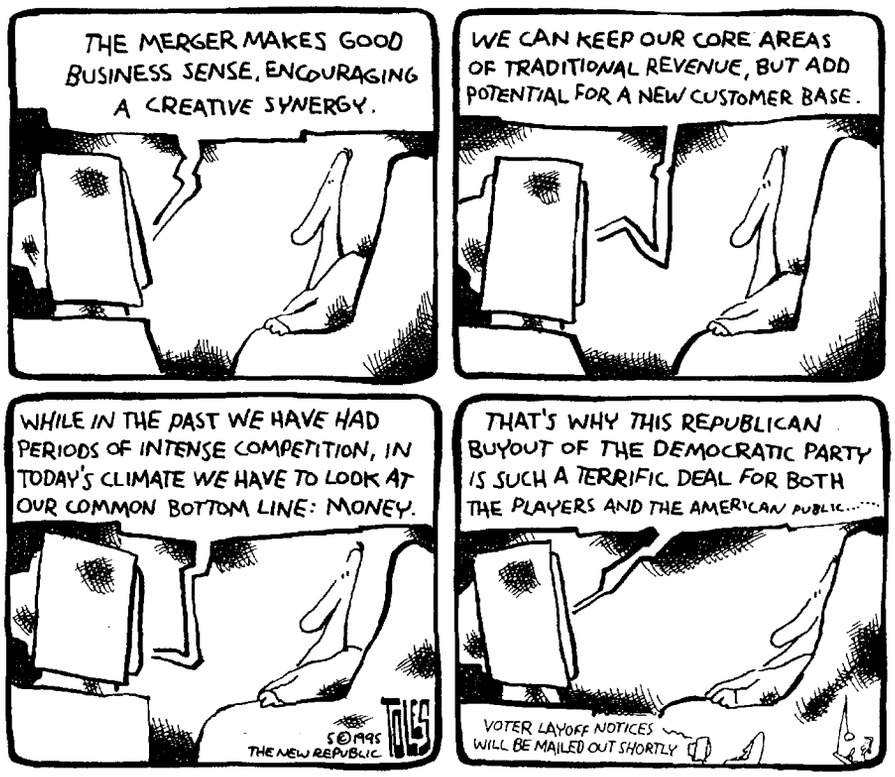
NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: Crimean leaders averted a confrontation with the peninsula's ethnic Russian majority by agreeing to dub the American soap opera "Santa Barbara" in Russian rather Ukrainian.... Three federal prosecutors returning from a fishing trip in Bimini chanced upon twenty-two pounds of marijuana bobbing in Miami waters.... An MCI advertising campaign chronicling a fictional publishing company has become so elaborate that MCI may turn it into a television series.... Parker Bros. acknowledged its 60-year-old Monopoly game misspells "Marven Gardens" as "Marvin Gardens" but said the error would cost too much to fix.... A judge in Decatur, Georgia, has returned a 14-year-old girl to the custody of her mother, who had tried to keep the girl from running away by chaining her ankles together.... General Mills is creating a new, multiracial Betty Crocker based on a composite of seventy-five computer images of actual women.... In his diaries, Oregon Senator Bob Packwood said of a bridge opponent: "God, was she a good player. I was so fascinated in watching her bid and play that I could hardly concentrate on the breasts."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TOLES

STEALTH CAMPAIGN: The cold war's end has rendered few weapons systems as obsolete as the B-2 Stealth Bomber. The multibillion-dollar batwing was designed to penetrate Soviet radar, but the General Accounting Office recently revealed that it can't distinguish a raincloud from a mountain. Even the Pentagon doesn't want any more built. But despite a last-minute challenge from the unlikely team of Ohio Republican John Kasich and California Democrat Ron Dellums during September's House vote, the planes, remarkably, live on. The House plans to order twenty more bombers, keeping production lines going into the next millennium. What's the secret behind the B-2's longevity? Northrop-Grumman, which builds the planes, hired Democratic pollster Peter Hart to test-market various pro-B-2 arguments with focus groups. After settling on a pitch—people responded to the claim that the B-2 exposes fewer pilots to danger—it unleashed a massive TV and print advertising blitz and mobilized its subcontractors to lobby Congress. This, increasingly, is how defense policy is formulated. Ironically, Northrop's lobbying campaign peaked just as House Republicans passed legislation preventing nonprofit recipients of federal grants—including the Girl Scouts and the YMCA—from lobbying the government. Republicans conspicuously declined to regulate the lobbying activities of for-profit federal contractors. Justifying the ban on nonprofit lobbying, Republican co-sponsor David McIntosh vented, "The federal government bankrolls its friends to pressure the federal government for more money." McIntosh, by the way, supports the B-2.

FORCE DE FRAPPE, UNWRAPPED: President Chirac's decision to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific has triggered a series of unexpected consequences for France. Leave aside the general outrage of the world community, trade and commercial boycotts by France's EU neighbors and the danger of growing nuclear proliferation. The decision's more spectacular fallout has been to unravel France's great-power Gaullist illusions, in Europe and throughout the world. Chirac's justification—that these are the last of a series of tests that will strengthen France's nuclear deterrent and that this deterrent might serve all of Europe—has been met with hostility and derision among France's European neighbors. The reason is simple. These tests serve France alone, and that cause has lost all luster, even within France. The end of the cold war and the war in Bosnia make it abundantly clear that nuclear weapons alone do not keep the peace and that anyway, Europe is incapable of acting without the leadership of the United States. We can only hope that Chirac has inadvertently helped to bring on the end of French neo-colonialism in the South Pacific. Nothing about the French testing decision is more disgraceful

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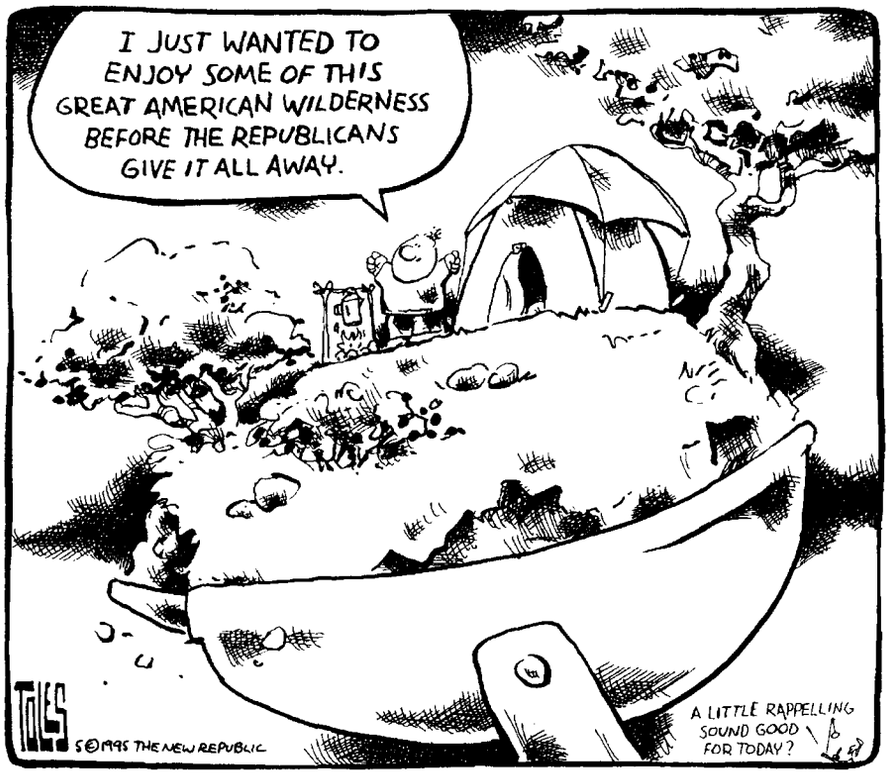
than the contempt it shows for those peoples, tens of thousands of miles away, who will suffer the fallout. The rioting and protests throughout "French" Polynesia have served notice on France's last grasp for world power, and it is welcome notice indeed. It is time for France to go home, leave the South Pacific in peace and find its proper place as one among many in Europe.

THIS YEAR IN JERUSALEM: In Israel last month, a year-long celebration was launched to mark the third millennium since King David made Jerusalem the capital of the Jewish commonwealth. Such events don't happen every day, or every year, or every century. Still, the U.S. ambassador didn't come to the opening of the festival, as the State Department spokesman explained, because *(a)* it was a cultural event to which he more properly dispatched the embassy's top cultural officials; *(b)* he was hosting a Labor Day barbecue in Tel Aviv; and *(c)* he had to attend the opening of a battered women's shelter in Herzeliya. Arguing in the alternative, lawyers call this sort of extenuation, which is of course nonsense. The truth, obviously, is that Martin Indyk's absence was a political decision, and since Indyk, who wasn't an American citizen until he got a job in the Clinton administration, is afraid of his own shadow, it is not likely to have been a decision he made himself. Maybe it was made by Dennis Ross, the State Department's Special Middle East Coordinator, who may have learned this sort of indifference to Jewish sensibilities from James Baker. Or maybe it was made by Warren Christopher, who learned his indifference from Jimmy Carter. There is something grotesque about this American indifference for this Jewish anniversary. Yes, it is a Jewish event. But there is nothing ugly about this kind of exclusiveness, as the representatives of an administration that makes a religion of diversity should know. When a tradition honors, and reckons with, itself, it does not insult other traditions, which have the same duty to honor, and reckon with, themselves. David was a Jewish king, and his descendants are celebrating his legacy to them. And his legacy does not include only the psalms, but also Jerusalem. What on earth does this have to do with the peace process? The Palestinians, Mr. Ambassador, are not the Jebusites, not least because they, the Palestinians, were not around when the son of Jesse left his capital in Hebron and came north to the citadel of Zion and built his city there. Faced with the obtuseness of the Clinton administration about Jerusalem, it is hard not to conclude that it is time for Senator Dole and Senator Lieberman to move their legislation to transfer the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, if nothing else as a reminder of the reality that it is this city, and none other, which is the capital of Israel.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TOLES
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A LITTLE RAPPELLING SOUND GOOD FOR TODAY?

INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITIES: If the Ayatollah's fatwa on Salman Rushdie was an act of advanced literary criticism, then India certainly has its share of tyro critics. Indira Gandhi began a lawsuit against *Midnight's Children*, because she objected to the novel's satire (the suit died with her assassination); the Indian government banned *The Satanic Verses* for fear of inflaming Muslim sentiment; and now Maharashtra state, which includes the city of Bombay, is considering a ban on Rushdie's latest novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The novel contains a withering portrait of the state's best-known Hindu fundamentalist, Bal Thackeray, who is the leader of the extremist (and troublingly popular) party Shiv Sena and Bombay's so-called "unofficial ruler." Though Thackeray (pronounced Tackeray) is a Maharati name, Rushdie has fun with it, giving the fictional politician the name of a different English novelist, Raman Fielding. Rushdie's Fielding is a vicious and crazed Hindu stormtrooper with a weakness for beautiful women. Add to this the book's joking about how the same fundamentalists are trying to turn the Hindu god Ram into "Battering Ram," and it seems that Rushdie has succeeded again. And once again, Rushdie's fiction has been given positively professorial scrutiny. Asked if he had read *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Thackeray replied: "I haven't read any of his books. I don't want to read books and spoil my thinking." •

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The coming budget deal from hell.

BIG ZEROES

By Matthew Miller

Ordinarily I'm not big on predictions, but the Washington buzz on the fiscal showdown ahead is so overblown and misguided that concerned budget fetishists have to speak up. The hype has it that we're headed for a "train wreck," meaning that the president will veto the deep domestic spending cuts Congress sends him, and Congress won't have the votes to override the veto. As a result, we'll face a government "shutdown," since without the enacted appropriations bills needed to fund federal operations for the fiscal year that starts October 1, we'll have to close up shop, bringing unspecified horrors. Then, either public outcry at the advent of this new dark age or a sudden realization that such a calamity must be averted, will ensure that the parties cut a deal—allowing both sides to claim victory and head for the stump.

This roller coaster narrative is useful for both parties; it lets each showcase its own brand of determination, either to enact a "revolution" or to calmly rebuff extremes. It also has a happy ending, in which both sides see the need to come together and "govern." But the likeliest outcome is far different: there will be a train wreck but no government shutdown. Alas, there will also be no compromise. By December, when the sound and fury has been exhausted, there's a strong chance that the entire budget will simply be put on hold until after the next election. After another year of huffing and puffing, that will mean it's back to the drawing board again.

Here's a sketch of the Kabuki dance that could lead to this Big Zero. All the normal caveats about prognostication apply, especially the fact that I may be wrong. But I submit the scenario anyway, since with any luck there'll be a budget version of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle at work. If, as you physics buffs recall, the very act of an object's being observed changes its properties, maybe there's hope that if we're all wise to the forces favoring gridlock, we'll head it off.

October 1. Some appropriations bills have been signed but not the "big four," which fund the departments of Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, Veterans' Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, Justice, State and Defense. These bills contain the GOP's headline cuts in education, training, research and foreign aid. The script is clear: Congress wants to pass bills the president will veto, and the president wants to veto them. This is the "train wreck."

Either after a Clinton veto or in anticipation of it, Congress passes what's called a continuing resolution (or CR) that temporarily funds these agencies in the absence of an enacted appropriations bill. CRs have long been a staple of budgeting; since 1978, in fact, the government has begun all but two years with such a resolution covering one or more appropriations bills. By custom, however, CRs fund programs at the lowest of three dollar amounts: what the House or Senate has voted for, or the previous year's funding. The crucial wrinkle this time is that, since Congress has already voted to decimate Clinton investments like national service, there's no way the president will accept a "lower of House or Senate" CR—at least not without a fight.

The finger-pointing and theatrics thus reach their first crescendo. Newt and Company claim they've done the responsible thing by passing the "usual" CR to let negotiations proceed, just as Democratic congresses did under Republican presidents. Clinton, countering that the CR would force him to bow in advance to extreme cuts the American people don't support, vetoes it. This is the government shutdown.

Or is it? As a practical matter, nonessential bureaucrats in the unfunded agencies (HUD, HHS, Commerce, etc.) are sent home without pay. But Social Security checks still go out, air traffic controllers stop planes from crashing, and so on. For 99 percent of Americans, the "shutdown" is an event on the evening news. Still, after a few days, both sides start getting antsy about being blamed for gridlock. The networks' nightly juxtaposition of Colin Powell's stately book tour with Washington's antics doesn't help. So, on day five, the White House and Congress agree on a CR that takes them through mid-November. Thus ends the vaunted shutdown.

November 15. The crowded calendar means that Congress finishes the big reconciliation bill (which covers tax and entitlement changes) only now. This is also when the government's borrowing authority is likely to run out, along with the temporary CR enacted to end the "shutdown." The reconciliation bill includes the big GOP tax cut and relies on a vague but CBO-approved cap on Medicare spending to achieve balance by 2002.

It's crunch time. The president vetoes the reconciliation bill, asking how the GOP can slash sick old people to pay for tax cuts for the rich. But the bill he vetoes also has in it the debt limit extension, without which the government could default on its bonds and send markets into a nosedive. Wall Street bigwigs fret nightly with Lou Dobbs, urging sanity. Clinton addresses the nation with his rationale for the veto, urging Congress to extend deadlines while he convenes a budget summit.

In the penultimate move in this game of chicken, Dole and Gingrich say *no.* Republicans have passed the revolution the country asked for, and it's on the president's desk. If Bill Clinton is such an out-of-touch liberal that he won't approve the American people's desire to cut taxes, cut spending, save Medicare, reform welfare, shrink government and balance the budget, why then he'll just have to bear the blame for a worldwide

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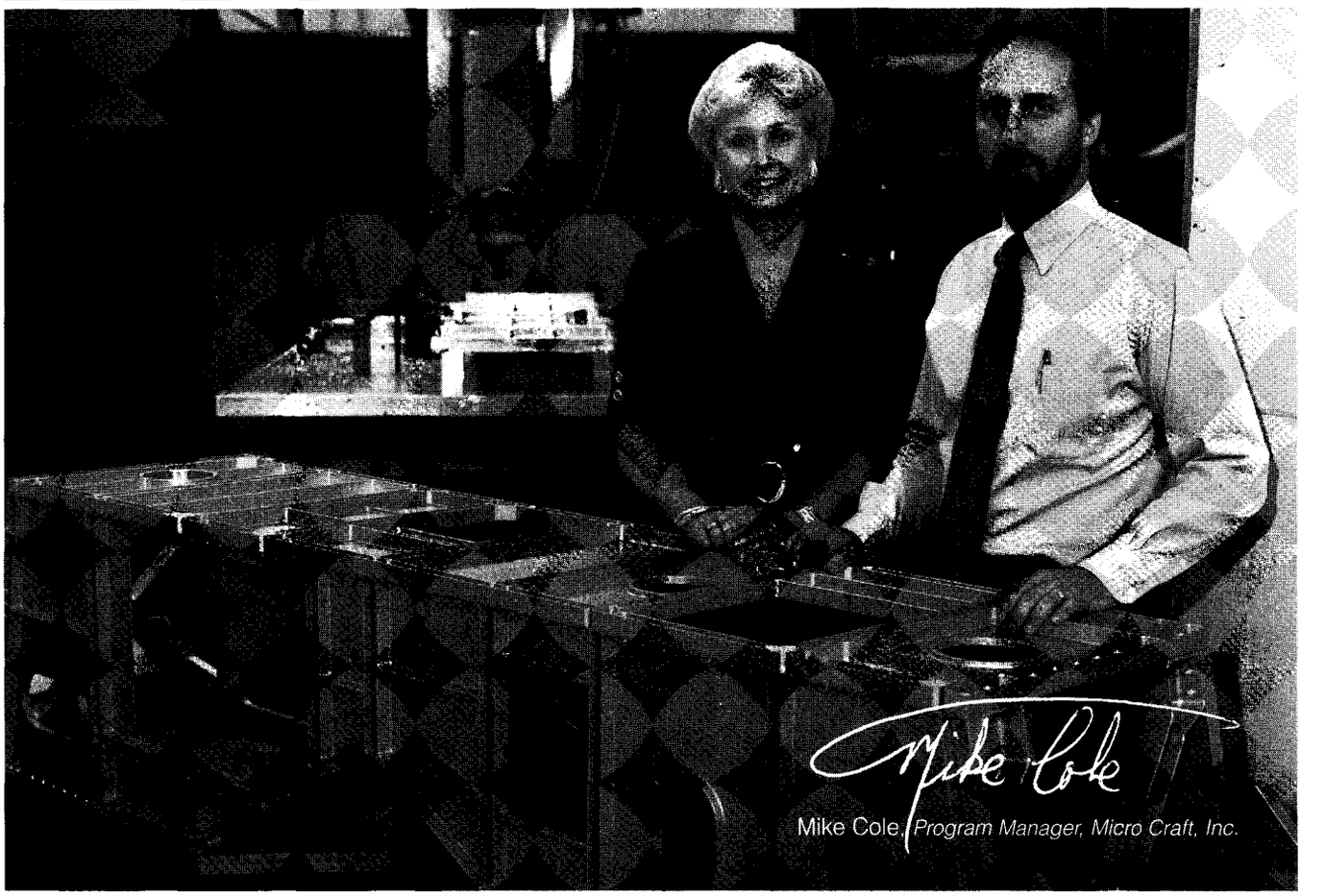
The Space Station. It's about life on Earth.

PROGRESS REPORT

SEPTEMBER 1995



Micro Craft's CEO, Fran Marcum, and Program Manager Mike Cole pictured with a Space Station internal node assembly.

"THE SPACE STATION WILL AFFECT THE LIVES OF MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD. IT'S ALREADY AFFECTING THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS HERE IN TENNESSEE."

"When most people think of aerospace manufacturers, they think of big companies. But we're a fairly small business, and we've built precision mechanical parts for a whole series of space programs. Today, we're responsible for the internal outfitting of the Space Station's Node 1, Node 2, and Cupola. We've already built more than 1,800 pieces of hardware, and many of those pieces will be on the first delivery flight to orbit. Micro Craft may be a small company, but we're making a big contribution. We take a lot of pride in that."

Moscow, Russia

Russia's Khrunichev space center and station prime contractor Boeing signed a $190 million contract in Moscow last month. The contract keeps the development of the Space Station's first flight element on track. The "space tug" being built by Khrunichev will launch in November 1997, provide initial power and propulsion, and become the first building block in station assembly.

Huntsville, Alabama

Skylab astronauts Jerry Carr and Bill Pogue, who set a long-standing U.S. space endurance record of 84 days in 1974, have donned space suits again. They worked with a team of Boeing engineers testing station hardware in an underwater facility. The tests, completed last month, simulated how components will be maintained on orbit.

BOEING

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financial meltdown himself!

At this point, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin walks into the Oval Office for a quiet conversation. "Yes, we're about to hit the $4.9 trillion debt limit," he says. "And if I can't keep borrowing, I won't have the cash to pay the $25 billion in interest on Treasury bills that's due Wednesday. But here's an idea. $1.3 trillion of that $4.9 trillion in debt is held by the government's trust funds for Social Security, federal pensions and Medicare. I'll reduce that debt by however much we like and credit a new checking account at the Treasury for the same amount."

"Run that by me again," the president says.

"It's just an internal bookkeeping entry," Rubin explains. "We take a dollar's worth of Treasury bills out of the Social Security trust fund. Then we set up an interest-bearing checking account for the Social Security trust fund somewhere else in Treasury and put a dollar in there. Since our *official* debt is lowered, there's more room to borrow under the *official* debt limit. And Social Security is unaffected. It's called 'disinvestment' of the trust funds." Rubin winks.

"Is it . . . ? "

"Legal? Apparently," Rubin answers. "It's been done before. Counsel's working on the opinion. It could buy us time indefinitely—a kind of backdoor around the debt limit."

The president flashes the same smile Janet Reno got before Waco. "Then I'll support the decision you've made, Bob," he says, "based on your assessment of the situation."

D*ecember: The finale.* Once Republicans realize the president can credibly avoid a default, and that the media glazes over when they challenge his methods, they agree to a budget summit. We're two months from the New Hampshire primary. Bob Dole is in the negotiating room. Phil Gramm stands outside by the cameras, waiting to nail Dole each night for anything that smells like a sellout of extreme conservative positions on tax cuts, welfare, spending cuts, you name it. This makes it risky, maybe impossible, for Dole to sign off on any deal the president will join. The president, meanwhile, privately hates his own budget proposals, let alone the prospect of ending up somewhere in the middle. They cut too deeply into his cherished investments, and were only offered as an expedient. But, with a clear shot to make his case in the campaign again, maybe he no longer needs a compromise. If he wins, he'll have moved the electorate toward his expansive goals. It's his only chance; at this point, a deal with the devil for the sake of appearing to govern is too much of a cave, even for Clinton.

At the height of the final impasse, Dole dines with the president privately in the Residence. Silverware scrapes on the china as they eat in silence. Dole finally speaks.

"Isn't it time for us both to just 'stand on principle'...?" Dole asks wryly.

"Blame each other for being unreasonable. . . , " says Clinton, continuing the thought.

". . . and take it to the voters? We can put the whole budget on a twelve-month CR. Been done before. Freeze everything in place. 'Let the people decide.' "

"Won't this guarantee an independent?"

"It'll happen anyway. We can always revisit once I get rid of Gramm. The nomination should be clinched by April. If Powell's a problem, we can do a deal before the conventions and take the issue away." The president ponders this for a minute.

"What about Newt? And the freshmen?"

"It's a question mark. But I think they'll go along."

At a joint press conference the next day the Grand Stalemate is announced. A twelve-month CR to keep the status quo, with the campaign to settle these "fundamentally different visions" of America's future. After a year of breast-beating and name-calling, no tax cut. No spending cuts. No Medicare fix. No welfare reform. No path to a balanced budget. Nothing.

If this scenario comes true, will it matter? You could argue, after all, that it's healthy to place rival visions before the public. But that presumes Democrats and Republicans really have "visions" rather than competing rhetorical strategies for acquiring power that bear little relation to solving the country's problems.

Meanwhile, every year that goes by without real budget progress brings us a year closer to the baby-boomers' retirement and a terrible reckoning. We can't free up resources to meet emerging national needs, let alone stem the tide of debt and unfunded promises that hang over our kids. Maybe we'll muddle through without a third party revolution. But like I said, I'm not much for predictions.

MATTHEW MILLER, a former Clinton budget official, writes on politics and economics.

Opportunism: a primer.

FLIP WILSON

By Peter Schrag

The competition is stiff: Bob Dole, who courted gay groups and happily took their money, now spurns them; Phil Gramm, a blue-ribbon winner for corporate pork, preaches self-reliance; Arlen Specter, the man who savaged Anita Hill, now serves as the party's conscience on women's rights. But, when it comes to political acrobatics, who can match California Governor Pete Wilson? Who even comes close? Others, from Bill Clinton on down, may slip and flip, but what other politician has reversed himself on

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There is no more daunting target on the agenda of scientific research than the replacement of fossil fuels with energy from the sun. If science triumphs, the use of inexhaustible, pollution-free solar energy will someday bring on an era of unprecedented health and prosperity. The world's decision makers often relegate solar research to the back burner when oil emergencies abate. But the challenge never vanishes in sun-drenched, resource-poor Israel. ❦ The Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot – equipped with spectacular, spohisticated solar furnace and solar tower facilities – is an acknowledged leader in solar research. Its experts pursue the development of new, cost-efficient ways to harness, store and transport the energy of the sun. ❦ Current Weizmann projects reflect ambitious goals: collecting solar energy in one country or region and shipping it to another by "solar energy pipeline"; producing hydrogen from water for use as a clean fuel; laser light produced by solar power instead of electricity; solar-heat gas turbines generating electric power. ❦ Albert Sabin once observed that the development of solar energy will benefit humanity more than any vaccine. Solar research merits support wherever sunshine inspires scientific imagination and skill.

The Weizmann Institute, founded in 1934, is a community of 2,300 scientists, engineers and scientists-in-training engaged in a full agenda of 800 research projects ranging from basic medical research in cancer, AIDS, neurosciences and children's diseases to chemistry, physics, agriculture, computer science and the environment.

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so many issues? What other governor in American history has filed suit against his own state to abolish programs and practices that he himself supported?

If you were inclined to sympathy, you saw in Wilson the not-altogether reprehensible plight of a moderate Republican trying to tack between his tender instincts on social issues like family planning and gay rights and the uncompromising demands of a political party that, in California and now in much of the nation, can seem like a religious cult. When Wilson first ran for governor in 1990, the California GOP, which never much liked him, held its collective nose and rallied behind him—wisely as it turned out—as the man most likely to retain the governorship for his party and, thus, keep the decennial reapportionment process in the nation's most populous state out of the hands of the Democrats.

But if California's right wing has used Wilson, he has used them as well. Pete Wilson is not simply the victim of shifting political moods, he is their master. In leaping on passing political trains and exploiting wedge issues, candidate Wilson is a performer of unique skill. Here's a brief guide to his twists and turns:

On affirmative action: Throughout much of this year, Wilson has led a fervent attack on quotas and preferences. First, he endorsed the proposed California Civil Rights Initiative, which would abolish all race and gender preferences in contracting, hiring and college admissions and is supported by some 65 percent of California voters. Then the governor penned an eight-page "open letter to the people of California" repudiating race and gender preferences in state affirmative action programs. He also issued an executive order abolishing hundreds of state advisory committees and other affirmative action bureaucracies. Finally, he strong-armed the University of California regents into abolishing racial preferences in hiring and admissions.

Perhaps the ultimate act of political chutzpah came in early August when he sued his own state, challenging the constitutionality of state affirmative action laws, some of which he had himself endorsed as recently as last year. "California's statutes," said the suit, "continue to make distinctions between its citizens in its hiring and contracting practices solely because of their race and ethnicity, despite the absence of any compelling reason to do so."

But through a thirty-year political career Wilson had found plenty of compelling reasons to do so: as mayor of San Diego in the 1970s, he backed a string of affirmative action measures, among them a "selective certification" ordinance—essentially a quota system giving preference to women and minorities in city jobs where they were underrepresented. Just last year he signed a bill as governor that broadens the definition of Hispanic in state contract set-asides to include Portuguese-Americans (a group to be reckoned with politically in California's Central Valley, though hardly one that can claim preferences on the basis of past discrimination). Just last October, a month before his re-election, Governor Wilson responded to a *San Jose Mercury News* questionnaire by stating that "I have long supported set-asides as a means to assist traditionally underrepresented businesses. . . ."

Wilson is hardly alone in his affirmative action flip, an issue on which even Democrats like Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, the chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council, have had second thoughts, and on which his chief rival, Bob Dole, has undergone a similar transformation. (In a statement loaded with considerably more ironic truth than must have been intended, Dole spokesman Bill Lacy declared that Wilson's turnaround "isn't really going to distinguish Governor Wilson from the rest of the field.") More important, set against the predictable responses of liberals, who managed, for the most part, nothing better than accusations of bigotry and racism, Wilson's cynical "letter" on affirmative action was a model of reasonableness and understanding.

But that can hardly be said of his other flips, some of them so absurd that, had they been executed by a less masterful "re-positioner," they might have been dismissed as sheer forgetfulness. Consider, for instance, his vehement denial, during a campaign based in large part on attacking illegal immigrants, that he and his ex-wife had themselves hired an undocumented housekeeper from Mexico. Or his explanation for the $7 billion California tax increase he signed in 1991, which seemed to border on abject confession of political error. As a flipper through offices and issues, Pete Wilson seems more prone to regard expedient changes of position as good politics than as a character flaw. Any flip is acceptable, said Wilson campaign manager George Gorton after his man's re-election last fall, as long as the flipper lands in a position that the voters agree with.

On taxes: When Wilson ran for governor for the first time in 1990, he wisely eschewed the standard Republican pledge not to raise taxes, a non-pledge that proved invaluable when the recession unmasked a decade of deficit rollovers and other fiscal irresponsibilities and left a $14 billion hole in the state's budget. Wilson and the Democrats who controlled the Legislature split the difference—half in program cuts, half in higher revenues, thus beginning the three-year spate of reductions in the state's once-generous welfare, health and higher-education programs that Wilson now touts as a model for national deficit reduction. But Republican presidential candidate Wilson, sounding like a defendant in a show trial, has now repudiated that act of moderation and compromise forced on him by liberal Democrats and solemnly vowed never to do such a thing again. To make amends, he is now pushing an indefensible 15 percent California tax cut that the deficit ridden state, with some of its major jurisdictions either in, or on the verge of, bankruptcy can't possibly afford. Although Democrats in the State Senate have blocked the legislation, he is now vowing to offer his tax cut as a ballot initiative next November.

On illegal immigration: As with the California anti-affirmative action initiative, Wilson did not create Proposition 187, the California measure passed by the

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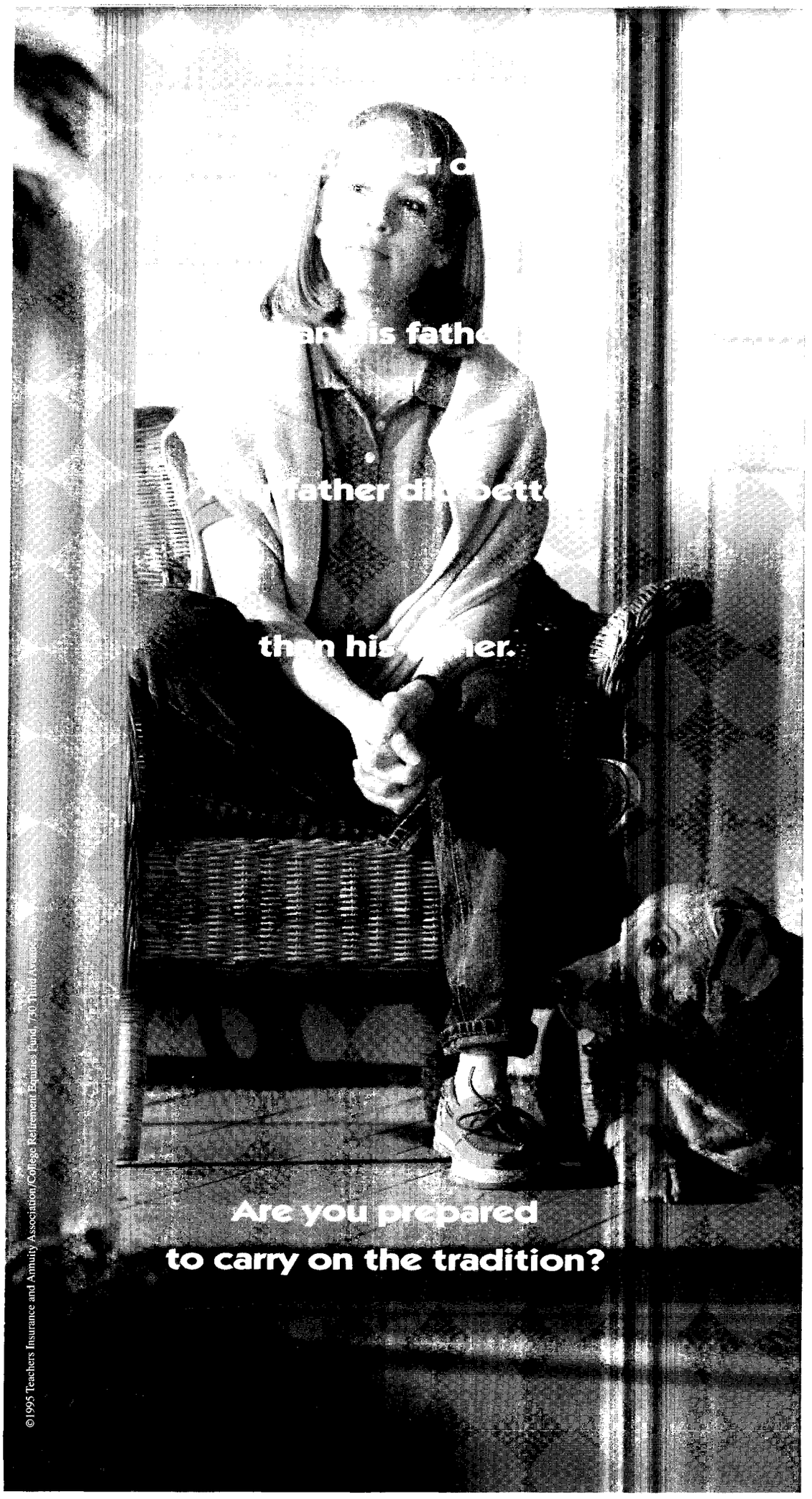

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voters last November which denied illegal aliens access to public education and most other social services. But he knew a good issue when he saw it and promptly leapt on board. Until the late 1980s, Wilson, then the junior senator of a booming state, had echoed the position of the big California growers who have contributed heavily to his campaigns: the looser the restrictions on the entry of low-wage Mexican farm labor, the better. He wrote exemptions into the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 for 350,000 farm workers and in the succeeding years pressed the Immigration and Naturalization Service to ease its enforcement of the "burdensome application procedures" that hampered their entry ("crops," he told Attorney General Ed Meese in 1987, "were rotting in the fields"). He also urged the INS to stop surprise raids on farms to search for illegal workers. In the end, the Special Agricultural Worker program that Wilson backed became an invitation to widespread fraud and led to the legalization of more than 1.1 million aliens, most of them in California.

In some respects, Wilson's immigration views have followed a familiar California course—demanding open borders when the economy booms, attacking immigrants when things turn sour. But for Wilson it also provided political opportunity. As long as George Bush was in office, the complaints about how much illegal immigrants cost the state were perfunctory and polite; as soon as Clinton replaced him in 1993—and despite the fact that Clinton funded immigrant-impact programs more generously than had Bush—Wilson's attacks turned vehement. He blamed the president not only for the federal government's failure to control illegal border crossings but also for the billions that the feds (under Reagan) had promised and allegedly owed the state for health, education and welfare services for immigrants, legal and otherwise.

Here there is yet a further twist (call it a double inverted twist with full gainer). Wilson, by then only a shadow of his formerly moderate self, made Proposition 187 one of his key campaign issues last fall. But, in private, he is reported to have assured friends that the courts would rule Prop 187 unconstitutional, ensuring that its more odious provisions (such as the requirement that all teachers, school officials and health workers report suspected illegals to the authorities) would never be enforced. In endorsing it, he said, he was only sending a message. The message was also, of course, a handy wedge to use against the divided Democrats and, judging from subsequent polls, a major factor in the defeat of his Democratic opponent, Kathleen Brown.

On abortion: Last year, before there was a presidential candidate named Wilson, the strongly pro-choice governor named Wilson declared that he would join New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman in a fight to remove anti-abortion language from the Republican platform. This spring, his presidential campaign chairman, Craig Fuller, declared that the abortion plank was "not something [on which] we are going to expend an enormous amount of energy," a statement echoed by campaign manager George Gorton—and then partially repudiated by yet another Wilson campaign spokesman. Wilson's statements this summer on public funding of abortions for poor women compounded these ambiguities. Does he support such funding? His first answer (on NBC's "Meet the Press") was negative: better, he argued, that the funds should come from private organizations like Planned Parenthood. But when a reporter reminded him that he consistently signed off on California budgets that provided public abortion funding, his answer changed. Now it was yes and no. No if the money comes from the feds; yes (sort of) if it comes from the state. He did not seem to recall that much of Planned Parenthood's funding also comes from public sources.

On miscellaneous issues: The list extends almost indefinitely. As mayor of San Diego, Wilson backed strong controls on development, until he had to raise large funds from developers to run for higher office. As a consequence, by the mid-1980s, according to Peter Navarro, a former mayoral candidate and one of Wilson's most knowledgeable critics, "the side effects of the suburban sprawl Wilson unleashed had reached epidemic proportions, with traffic congestion, overcrowded schools, water shortages, brown air and almost daily sewage spills into Mission Bay."

Wilson has both backed gay rights and vetoed gay rights bills he had previously pledged to support. He has blocked a decision by his own social services agency to allow gay and lesbian couples to adopt children and vetoed a mild domestic partners bill. On crime, at least, Wilson seems consistent: he's never met a sentence enhancement bill he didn't like and has championed California's three-strikes prison bills. But, then again, it was his administration, trying to deal with overcrowded prisons, that put many of the felons whose early release he complained about back on the streets.

Will all this flipping work again? Most political observers doubt Wilson has much of a chance unless front-runner Dole self-destructs. California, with its deteriorating public services, is in dismal shape, and Wilson, even under the best of circumstances, suffers from a lackluster personality. Worse, he was late organizing his campaign and is far behind the leaders in raising funds. True, all that may sound like familiar talk to a candidate who, over the course of three decades, has lost only one race—a bid for the gubernatorial nomination in 1978—and who overcame a nearly thirty-point deficit in his last election. In his other races for major office—mayor, senator, governor—he's seven for seven. This time, however, he may be counting too much on his wedges and his positioning. His showing in the polls has been awful. Even in California, where he must do well, Clinton leads him 57-38 in trial heats. The other day he withdrew altogether from Iowa, where he seems to have made no impression at all. Even the great acrobats can leap only so far.

PETER SCHRAG is editorial page editor of *The Sacramento Bee.*

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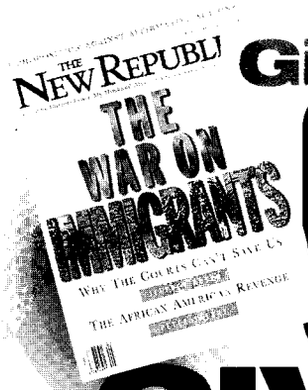

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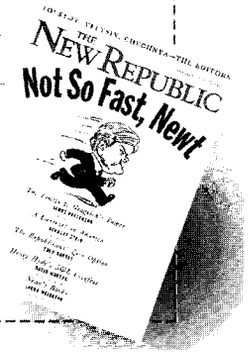

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RACE IN THE NEWSROOM

By Ruth Shalit

In the months following the November elections, *The Washington Post* has devoted hundreds of column inches to the convulsive debate over affirmative action. The paper's editorial page has published no less than five editorials roundly endorsing the practice. Top-flight reporters have been dispatched to the heartland to document the pique of "angry white males." What has gone unreported, however, is the growing backlash against affirmative action at the *Post* itself.

In the past ten years, the newspaper industry has committed itself wholeheartedly to a course of "compensatory" or preferential minority hiring. In 1985, journalists of color held 5.76 percent of the newspaper jobs in the nation. By 1993, they had nearly doubled their representation, to 10.25 percent. These dramatic gains, achieved during a period of cutbacks and layoffs in newsrooms across the country, have been produced through the determined efforts of editors at the highest levels. Virtually all major papers now boast minority recruitment staffs and in-house diversity units. Job fairs for black and Latino journalists are held all over the country each year. Internships, the surest route to full-time reporting positions, are heavily slanted in favor of minority applicants: in 1994, nearly 40 percent of all newspaper interns were members of minority groups.

In striving to make their newsrooms look more like America, some papers have gone even further. *The Los Angeles Times* issued, and later withdrew, a list of forbidden phrases: "gyp," "Dutch treat," "illegal alien." In 1993, Max Frankel of *The New York Times* told the *New Yorker* that one of his first actions as executive editor had been to "stop the hiring of non-blacks and set up an unofficial little quota system." The *Post*, however, has moved further and faster down this road than almost any other paper. "In terms of percentages," says Leonard Downie, the *Post*'s executive editor, "I think you'll find we have been much more aggressive than other places." Minority journalists account for 18 percent of the professional staff at the *Post*—well above the national average and disproportionate to the pool of aspiring minority journalists.

The *Post* has also been unusually candid about the newsroom tensions that underlie its multicultural vision. "There is racial friction in our newsroom, as there is in all newsrooms," says Downie. "Institutions that were predominantly white male in the past are going through growing pains. What's different about *The Washington Post* is we have not hidden that. We have commissioned studies about how things work. We've had lots of very public discussions about things. We've constantly exposed ourselves to self-criticism and to public view. And I think we're better off for it."

The *Post*'s candor is indeed admirable: editors at every level readily shared with me critical internal reports and responded frankly and at length to all my questions. But candor, unfortunately, is not the only reason that the *Post* presents a revealing and important case study in the mechanics of affirmative action. Despite real achievements, its well-intentioned efforts have gone awry, in ways that have implications for the politics of newsrooms across America and for the way that news is covered—and not covered—by newspapers in the future. Determined diversity hiring at the *Post* has provoked an affirmative action backlash, fanning racial tensions among white and black reporters as both groups feel aggrieved and victimized by discrimination. And the new editorial culture, in its eagerness to avoid offense at all costs, has sought to achieve not simply a racially balanced workplace but racially balanced news coverage, carefully edited to respect the increasingly brittle sensibilities of the relevant groups. The result has been to compromise the paper's traditional role as a gadfly in Washington, D.C., and in the nation as a whole.

If any organization could justify racial preferences as restitution for past sins, it would be *The Washington Post.* As the monopoly daily in a majority-black city, the paper had compelling reason to diversify what had been an overwhelmingly white newsroom. Twenty-five years ago, the *Post*—like most newspapers—was a largely white, middle-class bastion. There were no black assignment editors, no black foreign correspondents, no black reporters on the National staff. And its paternalism toward the black community was legendary. In 1950, for example, Publisher Philip Graham famously agreed to suppress news of a race riot in exchange for a promise by authorities to integrate the city's swimming pools.

In 1972, a contingent of black reporters, including the pathbreaking journalists Herbert Denton and Leon Dash, filed a complaint with the EEOC alleging they were victims of a racially discriminatory glass ceiling. Under an informal agreement, the paper grudgingly stepped

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up minority hiring, installing a black reporter on its National desk and bringing aboard several black sportswriters. If the *Post* was at first reluctant in its embrace of diversity, it soon got with the program. In the mid-'80s, the paper redoubled its affirmative action efforts following the publication of several internal reports lamenting the slow pace of integration. By 1986, the *Post* had hired its first full-time minority recruiter and set new, more aggressive affirmative action goals: one out of every four hires had to be a minority, and one out of every two a woman.

Over the years, these diversity efforts have been propelled by a peculiar series of racial psychodramas. On September 28, 1980, the paper ran the now-notorious story of "Jimmy," an 8-year-old heroin addict. Although written by a 26-year-old black reporter, Janet Cooke, the piece dripped with racial innuendo. Heroin, Jimmy supposedly told Cooke, "be real different from herb. That's baby s—. Don't nobody here hardly ever smoke no herb. You can't hardly get none right now anyway." The accompanying drawing featured a dazed-looking young man, his scrawny arm gripped by a giant fist as a needle is inserted. Black readers, including Mayor Marion Barry, immediately denounced the Pulitzer Prize-winning story as racist and preposterous; but the *Post* defended it almost to the end. When it was exposed as a hoax, the paper was mortified.

Photography by Debra Durocher

ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY RIGGS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Then there was the infamous magazine incident. In 1986, the *Post* endured a prolonged black boycott after the debut issue of its Sunday magazine featured a cover story about a black murder suspect, along with a column by Richard Cohen about white jewelry-store owners who, fearing robbery, refused to buzz young black men into their stores. Hundreds of black protesters, led by talk-show host Cathy Hughes, dumped thousands of copies of the magazine, some in flames, on the steps of the *Post*'s building on 15th Street. They repeated the ceremony every Sunday for thirteen weeks, stopping only after *Post* Publisher Donald Graham apologized and agreed to a series of appearances on Hughes's talk show.

The Cooke and magazine incidents, says Managing Editor Robert Kaiser, were "the product of a different newspaper." And, indeed, there's no question that the *Post* has, over the years, benefited greatly from its enhanced racial and sexual representativeness. "When all of our staff came from the same background, we missed what was going on," says Downie, who argues persuasively that a diverse staff is necessary to covering a diverse community.

Yet it is also true that, after a decade of determined diversity hiring, something at newspapers in general, and the *Post* in particular, has gone wrong. According to advocacy groups such as the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), a rising tide of racial prejudice is washing over America's newsrooms. In *Muted Voices*, the NABJ's 1994 Print Task Force report, the authors write that their findings are "indicative of despair.... Black journalists are strangling with their pain." Much of this pain, however, seems to be caused less by old-fashioned bigotry than by a sort of post-affirmative action racism. "[T]he idea that an African-American has been hired because of a political agenda of management or external pressure [is] still alive," the report laments.

To hear *Muted Voices* tell it, black reporters and their (mostly white) bosses are living in different worlds. While two-thirds of black journalists surveyed by NABJ said newsroom managers are not committed to retaining and promoting blacks, 94 percent of managers say they are. Ninety-two percent of the managers say promotion standards are the same for blacks and whites; 59 percent of black journalists say they think blacks have to meet *higher* standards.

At the *Post*, tensions are running particularly high. "A great deal of babbling goes on here about diversity," says National reporter John Goshko. "Nobody is happy. Many of the older white males feel that they are being discriminated against. Many minorities, particularly blacks, feel discriminated against. Each side will give you chapter and verse." White reporters, especially white middle-aged males, have become increasingly hostile to racial preferences. "We used to say: 'Let's go out and get the best guy in the world,' " says columnist Richard Harwood, the *Post*'s former deputy managing editor. " 'Let's get the best, without regard to anything else.' If there is, over time, a policy of giving considerable preference on the basis of color, your standards change. And I think that's the problem we're facing."

Not surprisingly, the *Post*'s minority journalists see things quite differently. Far from coddling them, they say, the *Post* has ensured that for reporters of color the path of upward mobility is treacherous. Like Alice and the Red Queen, they must run twice as hard merely to stay in place. "You see a glass ceiling slowly turning into

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lead," says Metro reporter Ruben Castaneda. "You realize there's no future." "Everyone in management has good intentions," says Gary Lee, a black reporter on the *Post*'s National staff. "But there's an entrenched newsroom culture that doesn't change." Even the Asian Americans are grumpy and radicalized. "Some [Asian reporters] think it's not a very welcoming atmosphere," says Metro reporter Spencer Hsu. "There are issues of mentoring and racial typing that can have a significant impact on our careers."

"It is a paradox," muses Assistant Managing Editor David Ignatius, "that this liberal institution that professes to care deeply about the community has a bad reputation in the African American community and has had some very unhappy African American staffers." In the past five years alone, fifteen black reporters have quit the paper. Some of the departed have written biting accounts of their time at the *Post*. In her 1993 memoir, *Volunteer Slavery*, former *Post* reporter Jill Nelson argues that racial insensitivity at the paper shattered her self-esteem and stymied her career. After editors at the paper caught her forging her supervisor's initials on a travel voucher for expenses incurred while reporting on Martha's Vineyard, they suspended her for a week. Nelson thought she knew why. "When it comes to spooks, there are no short cuts, no bending of the rules, no forgiveness," she wrote. "We answer to a higher authority ... the dictates of American racism."

Nathan McCall, author of the 1994 autobiography *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, is a *Post* reporter currently on leave from the paper. In 1987, when the *Post* tried to hire McCall from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, editors at the paper inquired about a three-year gap in his résumé. He told them he had spent the time traveling and "finding himself." In fact, he'd been serving a prison sentence for holding up a McDonald's at gunpoint. *Post* editors upbraided him for being less than honest but hired him anyway. Despite this kid-glove treatment, McCall, too, claims his career at the *Post* has been marred by racism. "Because of the myths, I could never seem to settle down and relax and write with flair the way I knew I could under normal circumstances," he wrote. "Nobody makes allowances for black folks anywhere."

These portrayals of the *Post* as a hotbed of racial iniquity have devastated the paper's top executives—Executive Editor Downie, Managing Editor Kaiser and Deputy Managing Editor Michael Getler. Children of the '60s all, they feel impelled to diversify not only because of legal and political pressures but because of personal inclination and social conscience. "There is a moral dimension to this," says Kaiser. "We've learned a lot, we white guys, in the last twenty or twenty-five years or so."

With penitential eagerness, they urge me not to view the Nelson and McCall books as contemporary indictments of the *Post*. "Jill Nelson left the *Post* a really bitter person, really unhappy," says Getler. "It is possible that today, with some of the institutions we've got in place, this talented writer could go to somebody and say, 'I feel like my career's going nowhere. I feel people aren't listening to me. I feel there's a racist attitude on the part of some of my editors. And I'm mad. I want you to do something about it.' " In October of last year, Getler invited Nathan McCall to host a brown-bag lunch on race in the newsroom. "These things happened to Nathan quite some time ago," says Getler. "I wanted him to see the paper has grown and changed." Getler pauses. "There are people in Nathan's book who feel that he trashed them," he says. "They were upset to read in this best-selling book that they were racists.... I tried to encourage those people to come to the lunch, to ask, 'Why did you say that about me?' But they didn't want to do that." Neither McCall nor Nelson would talk to me for this story. Nelson was summering on the Vineyard; McCall, who has a movie deal in the works, was, according to his agent, "all media-ed out."

In 1993, the *Post* commissioned an internal task force on newsroom life, headed by Getler, then the paper's assistant managing editor for Foreign News. For five months, Getler roamed the newsroom, trying to find out why, as one reporter he spoke to put it, "Very few people appear to be happy, most seem afraid." At the end of his labors he issued a ninety-page study, henceforth referred to as the Getler report.

The report, Getler wrote in the introduction, was "a growl from the belly of the *Post*." What people growled about mostly was race. Black staffers accused the *Post* of harboring a bias against them:

> Racial and ethnic minority staffers say the *Post* is not doing what it can, and should, by them.... Many African-Americans complained that, to be given good stories or challenging beats, they must work harder than whites at the same experience level....

At the same time, white staffers said they felt threatened by the *Post*'s rigid hiring targets. "One editor offered a common reaction," wrote Getler. " 'When you start to push for more black editors and more women, and maybe a few gays, the middle-aged straight white male is the last one you're going to worry about.' "

Getler and the other members of the *Post*'s diversity task force concluded the report by calling for the appointment of a deputy managing editor to oversee diversity issues. "Our group feels strongly," Getler wrote, "that the new person must be the third-ranking editor in the newsroom, with authority from the executive editor and the managing editor to make things happen." The job went to Getler. "I was surprised," he says modestly.

A friendly, approachable man who spent many years as a reporter and editor before becoming the *Post*'s diversity czar, Getler now spends his days patrolling the newsroom, blasting stereotypes and preaching inclusion. "There is racism, whether it's conscious or unconscious," he explains. "Most people say, 'Me? I'm not a racist. I'm a nice guy.' But you can have attitudes that you're not even aware of." Getler has set about remedying those attitudes. "The *Post*," he says, "is a very candid place. It's not defensive about itself. It's a place where you can say anything you want.... It's a place that lays open its warts in order to fix them."

But the confessional culture of diversity management

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can have ugly consequences. Things are said that would ordinarily be left unsaid. Whether viewed as resurgent racism or justified resistance against preferential treatment, the white backlash against blacks at the *Post* is undeniable. Many *Post* staffers allege that in playing the numbers game, the paper has been forced to hire inappropriate people, reporters who lack the skills to do daily newspaper work competently. "It's definitely a huge advantage in this business to be a minority," says one reporter. "Like, a giant, giant, giant advantage. There is just a different standard. White people have to knock their heads against the door and be really exceptional. Whereas, if you're black, they recruit you, they plead with you, they offer you extra money." Even more maddening, these reporters say, is when these overindulged recruits then complain of racism. "They're denying the truth," says one reporter. "There's a strong argument to be made that we should do this. But there's no argument to be made that they're not getting a leg up." Says another: "If you're based in a mostly black city, of course you need some black reporters and some editors. I don't know what the answer is. I just know that the solution can be quite irritating. And then it's doubly irritating when they then complain."

Kevin Merida, a lanky and dashing black reporter with a soft voice and easygoing manner, laughs out loud at the suggestion that minority journalists are being hired and promoted ahead of schedule. "The biggest myth in journalism," he calls it. To the contrary, he says, the newspaper business brutally limits the aspirations of African Americans. "A little light is always going on in your head," he says. "There's a general sense of feeling, somehow, that your value, your worth, is not completely taken into account." He says, "There's a sense that you're not valued as you would like to be valued."

Merida's consternation is puzzling to white reporters. The *Post*'s National staff is tiny, the waiting list, endless. But Merida didn't have to slug it out at the bottom in Metro with everybody else. After being lured away from *The Dallas Morning News*, where he was an assistant managing editor, he was immediately dispatched to the National desk. He's got what would seem a plum job, covering Congress and the '96 campaign. Moreover, he has the latitude and standing to pursue stories of special interest to him. "I'm a black man," he says. "The black experience is part of who I am. And I try to incorporate that in my coverage." Merida cites three recent examples: a sympathetic profile of embattled senator Carol Moseley-Braun; a story criticizing the art in the Capitol as colonialist and lacking in racial diversity; and a story about how the Senate had condemned Khalid Muhammad for his statements about Jews, yet seemed to be holding Senator Ernest Hollings, who disparaged "African potentates," to a different standard.

Merida's insecurity about his position in the newsroom may, more than anything else, be a function of the tokenist assumption—the suspicion that he got his job because he was black. At *The Dallas Morning News*, Merida advanced from reporter to AME in one fell swoop, a precipitous promotion that has dogged him all the way to Washington. "Have you ever heard of that happening in the entire history of the news business?" asks one white *Post* reporter. "There's supposed to be a very clear path. It's like being a private, and suddenly you're a general." It's the classic plight of the affirmative-action baby, whose genuine accomplishments are tainted by a preferential system beyond his control.

The *Post*'s diversity goals have spawned a burgeoning bureaucracy administered by Jeanne Fox-Alston, director of hiring and recruiting. In 1986, she was plucked off the *Post*'s graphics desk and instructed to revamp the paper's personnel office so that, in her words, it "focused more on women and minorities." These days, one of her tasks is to winnow out white males, some of whom she regards as having an overly developed sense of entitlement. "Some of them have had some really good stories," she says. Fox-Alston is a small, reedy woman in her early 40s, with a gray topknot and the tight, pursed mouth you see on the assistant principal. "They've put their years in. Maybe they've even won awards. And they see people being hired who perhaps don't have as much experience as they do. Why?" Mockingly, Fox-Alston's voice keens into the upper register. "'It must be because I'm a white male,'" she whines. "Well, there's more to it than that." Fox-Alston elaborates. "There's one guy from a New Orleans paper who's been trying to get hired here for quite a while. And he wrote the deputy managing editor a letter, saying, 'Friends at the *Post* tell me the only reason I haven't been hired is because I'm a white man.' Now, in talking to the deputy managing editor about this particular candidate, I said, 'Well, it's true that on his résumé he has some good experience and stuff like that. But you know, he's terribly annoying, and he's not as good as he thinks.'" Fox-Alston leans back in satisfaction. "He didn't get hired."

The New Orleans journalist she is referring to, editors say, is Tyler Bridges of *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, a talented, aggressive reporter who, as it happens, has written extensively about white racism. He has been praised in the *Post* itself for breaking the David Duke story. "Over the years," says one *Post* editor, "Jeanne has been little more than a bar against the paper getting the best. She seems to have something against white males. She doesn't like people who have achieved." Bridges, for his part, says he doesn't consider himself a victim. "So far, the paper has been very fair to me," he says.

Fox-Alston's own journalistic credentials are somewhat skimpy. She was a reporter for the now-defunct *Kansas City Times* for two years in the early '70s. She's been a copy editor at *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Washington Post*. She also worked on the *Post*'s graphics staff. "I did that for eighteen months or so," she says. "Then I became director of hiring and recruiting." According to the Getler report, Fox-Alston has "found or helped persuade to come here" 57 percent of people hired by the *Post* in the last five years. As

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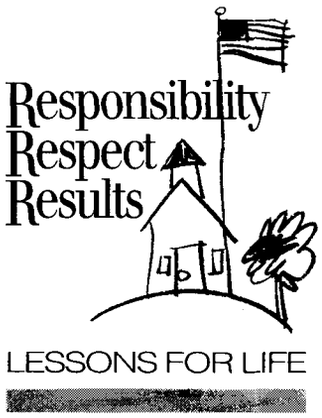
Where We Stand

BY ALBERT SHANKER
President, American Federation of Teachers

It Works

The AFT has launched a national campaign for standards of conduct and achievement in U.S. schools. The public overwhelmingly supports these standards—and so do the people who work in the schools. But they haven't been heard.

Policymakers and reformers have gotten caught up in faddish and radical schemes for improving the schools, and they ignore what is obvious to people who work in the schools and to parents who send children there: Unless you have order and civility, not much learning will go on. And unless there are high academic standards, which students are expected to meet and helped to meet, school programs become trivial and meaningless; they do not prepare students to become responsible and productive members of society. Focusing on safe and orderly schools and high academic standards makes common sense, it works and it's long overdue.



What kind of teaching and learning can take place in classrooms where teachers have to spend their time dealing with students who are violent or who constantly disrupt the class by shouting obscenities and threatening other students? And yet, in too many schools, students who want to learn, and teachers, have no protection from this kind of thing. A school district may have a discipline code that is poorly written—or it may have none at all. But even an excellent code can only be effective if it is enforced, and many are not because school districts may be worried about their reputation or a court challenge. Or perhaps there is no place to send troublemakers but out on the street.

Safe and orderly classrooms are essential preconditions of learning. But we also need clear and rigorous academic standards. Students and parents—and all citizens—need to know that promotion from one grade to another and graduation from high school mean that academic standards have been met. They need to know that high grades stand for high achievement and a high school diploma means having the knowledge and skills essential for college and a good job.

Teachers, and the AFT, have supported high standards of conduct and achievement for a long time, but they can't bring it about alone. Parents and the public, across all demographic groups, have also said for a long time that safe and orderly schools and high standards in the core academic subjects are their priority. The 1994 Public Agenda Foundation survey, "First Things First," and the 1995 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll that I have discussed previously are only the most recent evidence. But individual parents and citizens, acting one at a time, have not been able to get school districts, their elected representatives and reformers to make high standards of conduct and achievement a priority. Acting together, however, we can get the job done. And that's what the AFT's national campaign is about.

How will AFT's national campaign accomplish its goals? In the first phase, we are concentrating on urging individuals and community groups at the local level to endorse the "Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Learning" (see facing page) and to urge school districts to adopt it. We'll also work together to get school districts to establish or modify discipline codes so that they are clear, fair and enforceable and to establish alternative educational placements for violent or chronically disruptive students. And we'll continue urging states and districts to establish clear and rigorous academic standards, helping them to do it and to ensure that students have the help they need to meet standards.

The second phase of the campaign will concentrate on making sure discipline codes are enforced and reviewing how current due process procedures for students help or hinder fair and consistent enforcement, as well as beginning the process of tying promotion and graduation to meeting rigorous academic standards. Putting high standards of conduct and achievement firmly in place in our schools may also mean working together to change state and federal laws that stand in the way.

Last November's elections showed how angry people are because they can't seem to get what they want from their government. It is the same thing in education. Parents and the public strongly support public schools. They do not want to turn the schools over to for-profit outfits, and they have repeatedly rejected vouchers. What they want, first and foremost, are safe and orderly public schools that focus on high academic standards for students. AFT's national campaign is about giving people the hope and the tools they need to get what they have been asking for.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1995 by Albert Shanker.

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A Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Learning:

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The traditional mission of our public schools has been to prepare our nation's young people for equal and responsible citizenship and productive adulthood. Today, we reaffirm that mission by remembering that democratic citizenship and productive adulthood begin with standards of conduct and standards for achievement in our schools. Other education reforms **may** work; high standards of conduct and achievement **do** work—and nothing else **can** work without them. Recognizing that rights carry responsibilities, we declare that:

1. All students and school staff have a right to schools that are safe, orderly and drug free.
2. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts and schools that have clear discipline codes with fair and consistently enforced consequences for misbehavior.
3. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts that have alternative educational placements for violent or chronically disruptive students.
4. All students and school staff have a right to be treated with courtesy and respect.
5. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts, schools and classrooms that have clearly stated and rigorous academic standards.
6. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in well-equipped schools that have the instructional materials needed to carry out a rigorous academic program.
7. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in schools where teachers know their subject matter and how to teach it.
8. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts, schools and classrooms where high grades stand for high achievement and promotion is earned.
9. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts and schools where getting a high school diploma means having the knowledge and skills essential for college or a good job.
10. All students and school staff have a right to be supported by parents, the community, public officials and business in their efforts to uphold high standards of conduct and achievement.

LESSONS FOR LIFE

A NATIONWIDE CAMPAIGN SPONSORED BY THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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the *Post*'s diversity vetter, how much power does she actually have? "She has a negative power," chuckles one former *Post* editor. "If you don't have a rabbi somewhere else, and she doesn't like you, she can bury you." Says Rem Rieder, a former *Post* editor now at *American Journalism Review*, "I get calls from people all the time: 'Jeanne slam-dunked me, anybody else you think I should call? Or can you call somebody?' Of course, the world is full of people who want to work at the *Post*. And, unfortunately, not all of them can."

While earnestly troubled by blacks' career anxieties ("African-American reporters ... have powerful things to say about the *Post* as a workplace"), the Getler report presented the grievances of white males as "myths" to be "corrected": "Diversity does not mean excluding white men or threatening their jobs. It does not mean ... hiring unqualified or less qualified people." Resistance to affirmative action is to be dispelled through re-education: "White men's concern about how diversity affects them should be addressed.... They should be closely involved in diversity training to help them define their role in a changing newsroom."

But diversity training may not be sufficient to stem the current white backlash against affirmative action, which sometimes bubbles over into pure racial animosity. In my discussions with white reporters and editors, I was surprised to hear many of them question, in the coarsest terms, the ability of their minority colleagues. "She can't write a lick," for example, or "He's dumb as a post." Or worse: "When she files, you literally don't understand what she's saying. And you have to go back to her again and again and ask: What are you trying to say?"

The ugliness of these sentiments suggests that covert racism may be simply inflamed by the push for diversity. But at the *Post*, the explosive interaction of aggressive hiring with instinctive white anxiety has given such feelings a pretext. Even President Clinton acknowledges that federal law requires that minorities be hired from the relevant pool of qualified applicants, not in proportion to their population in society at large. In other words, the *Post*'s goal—to reproduce in its building the precise ethnic makeup of its community—is not only irrational but arguably illegal. "The concept of diversity begins with the idea that a newspaper's staff and coverage should reflect the racial, gender and ethnic makeup of its market," concludes the Getler report. But to comply with the Supreme Court's standards, the *Post* should instead be tailoring its goals to the pool of qualified aspiring journalists. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, blacks and Hispanics compose 10.6 percent of the available pool of college graduates; within that group, the pool of students expressing an interest in communications is a mere 13 percent. Even without making allowances for the *Post*'s attempt to skim off the best people from the best schools, the attempt to mirror the 32.3 percent of blacks and Hispanics in metropolitan Washington itself seems flamboyantly unrealistic.

In 1994, the paper made thirty-eight new hires. Of those thirty-eight, ten were members of minority groups. "Our goal for about the past eight years has been that at least a quarter of our hires be people of color," says Fox-Alston. In pursuing this goal in spite of a minuscule pool, the *Post* has committed itself to a course of quite extraordinary affirmative action; and so the complaints about compromising standards, while undoubtedly overstated by aggrieved white reporters, are corroborated by the stark numerical reality.

The *Post*, of course, is in an agonizing position. If editors refuse to adjust their traditional hiring standards, they will end up with a nearly all-white staff. But if they do reach out aggressively to ensure proportionate representation for each relevant minority, they transform not just the complexion but the content of the paper.

One flashpoint for aggrievement is the *Post*'s designation of "black slots," cordoned off for African Americans only. Some, such as the race-relations beat on the National desk, have been vacant for months as the paper combs the country for a suitable black hire. "We were told that if we gave it to somebody else, it would have a major adverse morale effect on black staff members and would immediately set us up for all kinds of mumbling and have-you-walked-in-my-shoes kind of stuff," says a National editor. Many white reporters say they are weary of being told in interviews that they could not even be considered for particular jobs. When David Mills, a black cultural writer on the Style section, departed for Hollywood over a year ago, a parade of reporters inside and outside the *Post* applied for the job, only to be told that they were the wrong color. The position was finally filled in August by Esther Everem, an African American from *New York Newsday*.

Political pressure to promote minorities can also result in some of the most talented black journalists being put in jobs they don't want and are not cut out for. Consider the circumstances surrounding the promotion of Eugene Robinson, a foreign correspondent who is now the paper's Foreign editor. When Mike Getler was kicked upstairs, the next in line for his job of AME-Foreign was Jackson Diehl, also white and male. "It wouldn't have looked good to promote yet a third white male, all in the name of Getler and this task force to promote minorities," says one *Post* reporter. "There needed to be a minority somewhere in that announcement." The job was offered to Caryle Murphy, the paper's Pulitzer-winning correspondent in Cairo. Murphy said no thanks. So the *Post* called on Robinson, a black reporter who had just hauled his whole family to the paper's London bureau. Robinson, too, was happy where he was. His family was happy. His wife had found a job in London. He said no, and no again. "They just put incredible pressure on poor Gene to come back and take this job as Foreign editor because they wanted a black, and they just couldn't find anyone else to do it," says a source on the Foreign desk. Admits Robinson: "They did have to cajole me. I was happy in London." There were other complications. "Gene is an interesting story," says a Foreign editor. "Here's a guy who was a fantastic corre-

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spondent, a really fluid, graceful writer who liked being abroad.... And frankly, he was a better correspondent than editor.... They brought him in because they were looking to promote blacks into prominent management roles. In some cases that works fine. In other cases, the *Post* has suffered because you have a great correspondent who's not writing anymore."

Many reporters, meanwhile, resent being viewed as walking monuments to the paper's virtue. "I worked the night police," says Carlos Sanchez, who left the paper in 1994 and is now working at *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. "I had nothing to do with the Hispanic community unless they were killed. One evening I show up for work. And [Metro Editor] Milton Coleman is there, conveying his apologies for not informing me prior to that evening that I needed to attend a formal dinner with him. I wasn't dressed for dinner. I was extremely uncomfortable.... But I went." To Sanchez's chagrin, the dinner turned out to be a love-in with local Hispanic community leaders at a Salvadoran restaurant. "I found myself kinda being showcased," he says. "That bothered me."

Editors at the *Post* insist their diversity campaign has more to do with improving coverage than redressing past grievances. All the same, it doesn't always follow that a reporter of a particular ethnicity is the best person for a particular "ethnic" slot. Take, for example, the protracted battle over whether or not to hire reporter Douglas Farah. Farah is the son of Christian missionaries from Kansas, but he was born and raised in Bolivia and grew up fluent in Spanish and steeped in the culture and politics of Latin America. Ethnically, however, he's no more Hispanic then, well, Mike Getler. From 1987 to 1989, Farah was a stringer for the *Post*, based in El Salvador. There, he risked his life for the *Post* with his prizewinning reporting on death squads and Colombian drug kingpins. One fine day it dawned on someone that the *Post* ought to hire Doug Farah. So he was flown up to Washington for a round of interviews. The problem was, no one could testify decisively as to Farah's ethnic pedigree. He was slightly swarthy looking, with a mustache, but his name was indeterminate. Finally, then-AME-Foreign Mike Getler, according to several of those present, just blurted it out. "Gee, Doug," he said. "Everyone is just so excited at the prospect of hiring such a talented Hispanic reporter!" "Gee, Mike," Farah reportedly responded, "I'm happy to be a Hispanic reporter if you'd like me to be, but I'm from Kansas." Getler's face fell. "You are?" "Yeah." Around the room, according to one of those present, "everyone just looked at Doug ... like he'd just messed his diaper. It was not the correct response."

Why was Farah's putative Hispanicity such a big deal? At the *Post*, aspiring foreign correspondents are usually required to serve on Metro before being dispatched abroad; and Farah's backers had been selling him to Metro as a perfect match for the section's newly created Latino Task Force on coverage. After Farah's whiteness was unmasked, the Metro desk hired Graciela Sevilla of *The San Diego Union-Tribune* to fill the slot. Ironically, Sevilla ended up leaving the *Post* after less than a year. "I knew that they really wanted to bring in more Latinas," says Sevilla, now at *The Arizona Republic*. But they didn't have a clear sense of why. Farah, meanwhile, seems to be thriving. Finally hired by the paper in 1992, he has spent the past month shuttling between Havana and San Salvador, and could not be reached for comment.

Questions about a possible tradeoff between diversity and quality are received with discomfort and indignation. "No, no, no," says former *Post* newsroom personnel director Tom Lippman, now a reporter with the paper. "The notion that the hiring of nonwhite people involves the compromise of standards is an unacceptable notion. We don't accept it. We shouldn't accept it." Says Mike Getler, "That is wrong, that is wrong, that is wrong. We want to diversify the staff, but only with good people. A person's professional skills and capabilities are still the determining factor." Milton Coleman, asked how his Metro section got to coveted parity, replies, "By simply hiring the best people for every single job."

But as the *Post*'s internal documents show, these assurances are misleading, if not substantively false. Early this year, Jeanne Fox-Alston prepared a report for the AMEs on the subject of minority recruitment, in hopes of discovering why the pool of young minority journalists seemed, in her words, "so small and so shallow." Admitted Fox-Alston in her report: "We have a difficult time finding experienced minority journalists at the top of their form (or close to it) for significant and specialized jobs, whether assignment editing jobs on any section or a specialty beat on a staff like National." Hiring decisions, she wrote, "should be made with the understanding that we will continue to fall short of our goals for minority hiring if we aren't more flexible and creative." The Getler report alludes to similar tradeoffs. "Senior managers said they value staffs with a good mix; but several also said that, when deciding which reporters to assign to which beat, they feel themselves balancing the need to preserve the *Post*'s standard of excellence against calls for greater diversity." The report's conclusion: "People must not be placed in jobs for which they are not 'ready,' but the word 'ready' is subjective."

It's a common enough argument, one made by many advocates of proportional representation: merit standards are subjective and should be adjusted when possible to secure racially balanced results. The trouble is that the paper can't come out and *say* it, except in tightly circulated internal documents. On the record, therefore, editors insist that the *Post*'s standards are unrelenting. These evasions create the impression that the *Post* has something to hide, fueling white paranoia and resentment.

But there is an even nastier consequence. The antagonism is heightened by legions of lazy editors who fudge the real reason for hiring and promotion decisions. Increasingly, affirmative action is used as a pretext, an all-purpose excuse to brush off white candidates whom the *Post* would never hire anyway. "They told me I was perfect for the job," one frustrated white male told me. "I was just the wrong color." Says another: "They told me

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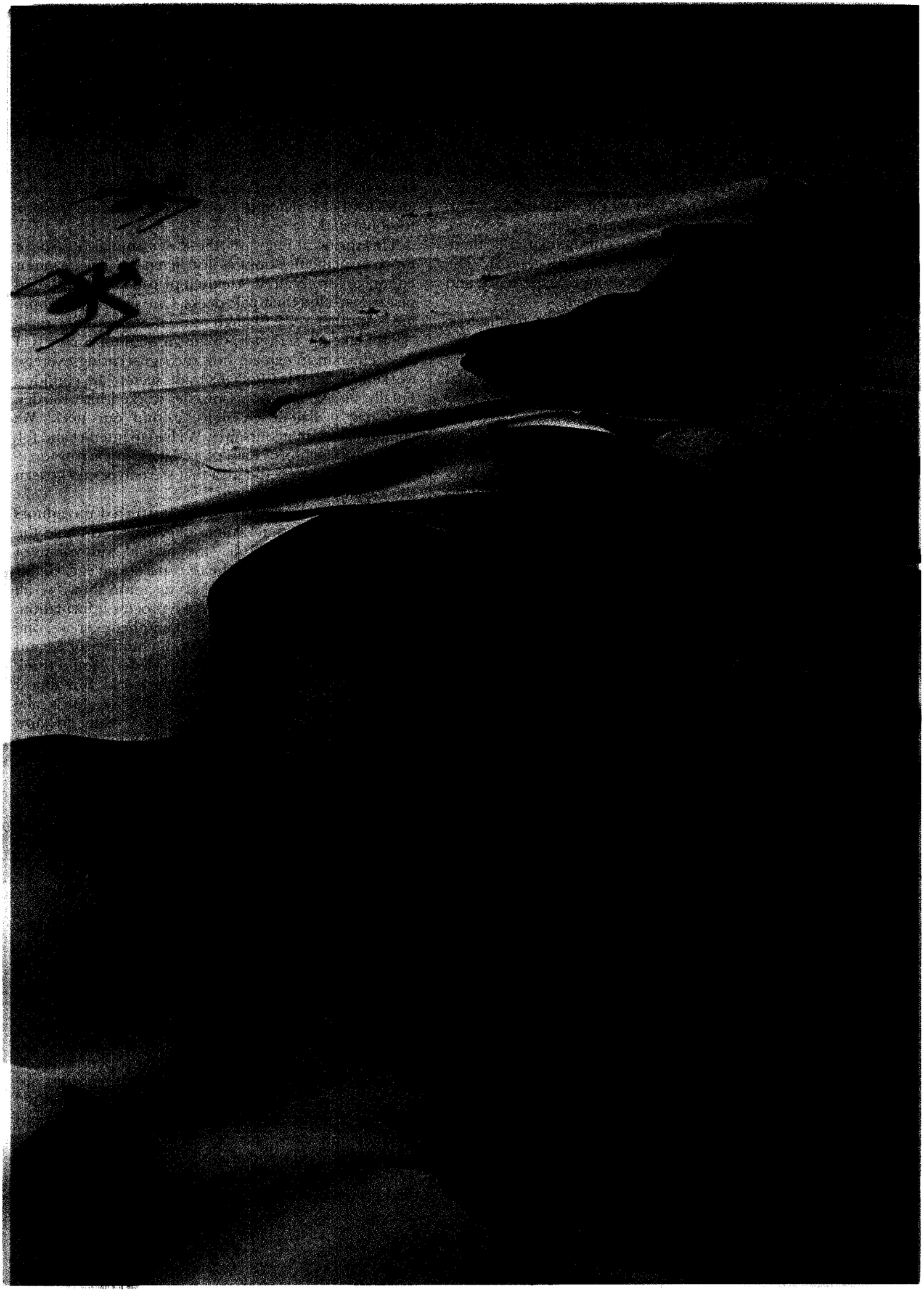

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they would have loved to hire me, but there were racial factors at work." Were these candidates told the truth? "This is hard for me," says Kaiser. "I suspect that [diversity] has been used as a pretext at the *Post*. And I'm enormously sorry about it."

Says a veteran *Post* reporter: "You hear this all the time, and it's crap. I remember years ago, when I applied for a job, I was told by the person who interviewed me: 'Gee, you'd have a better chance if you were black or a woman.' Well, the fact of the matter is, there were a lot of honkies hired after me. Let's get real." The reporter reapplied when he had more experience and was hired by the *Post* without a problem.

As white and black resentments feed on themselves, the *Post* seems unable to escape from the vicious circle. As the situation gets worse, the rhetoric grows more extreme. Until the only solution, it seems, is remedial education.

II.

"U.S. news organizations have been slower than other corporations to embrace diversity training," explained the Getler report. "The *Post* should be at the forefront of this initiative." *Post* employees, wrote Getler, needed to "take a long hard look at ourselves ... [at] newsroom culture [and the] ... assumptions and values we bring to it." This they could not do alone. "We need an objective outsider," he wrote, "to help us begin the process and determine a clear picture of this culture." The *Post* needed a diversity consultant.

In the absence of formal sensitivity training, Getler wrote, citing an earlier report, the *Post* would be forced to "rely on a few journalists ... to serve as the conscience of the newsroom." And "conscience" is indeed the operative word here. For diversity training at the *Post* has less to do with improving coverage than allowing guilty editors to feel the glow of involvement. "We are," says Getler, "trying to improve our newsrooms and ourselves."

On this humid August morning, Getler sits behind an oak desk in his large, glass-paneled corner office, laying out his grand vision of harmonious integration at *The Washington Post*. "The fact is," he says, "these issues exist. You wind up doing things unthinkingly that are perceived by your staffers, or your readers, in our case, as racist. And you need be conscious of that." Getler leans forward in his chair. "Newspapers need to be alert," he says in a patient singsong. "They need to be aware. And they need to get over this idea that all this stuff is corny and politically correct."

Some of Getler's dearest friends at the *Post* are dubious about his newfound enthusiasms. Says one *Post* editor of the paper's former Bonn bureau chief: "We all think Getler had a brain transplant in a German hospital." Even those sympathetic to diversity are leery of the attendant caring, sharing and soul-baring. "It's just all these stupid exercises, which anyone under 30 had in high school and thought were trite and foolish then," says one reporter. "But for these 50-year-old white guys, it's like the shades have been lifted from their eyes. It's a great revelation."

The prophet of the new order is diversity consultant Rafael Gonzales, hired in 1994 to comb the newsroom for traces of insensitivity. President of Rafael Gonzales Enterprises, a San Jose-based diversity firm, he has already trained top *Post* managers and in late September and October is slated to move on to the rest of the professional staff.

This spring at Pugwash, the Post's annual retreat for top management, Gonzales instructed the paper's senior editors to form a circle. He then placed large cardboard placards around their pale necks. One sign read: "Ignore me." Another read: "Laugh at me." Still another read: "Don't take me seriously." Managing Editor Kaiser is at first reluctant to explain how the sign-wearing exercise worked. "I think it's Rafael's trade secret," he confides. Finally, he explains how Gonzales worked his wizardry. "We had a half-dozen signs around our neck. We couldn't read them ourselves. We had to interact and follow the instructions." Kaiser loved it. "It got across forcefully and effectively the idea that stereotypes do govern the way we deal with people."

In another exercise, Gonzales instructed the editors to say, "folk" ten times, then asked them to name the white part of an egg. "Yolk," they all said, with visions of "folk" in their minds. No, the *white* part of an egg. Get it? This exercise, Gonzales says, was meant to show "we all have filtering systems for how we process information. We all have biases." There was yet another exercise, one in which editors had to pick out the number of f's and s's and o's in a paragraph. Marvels Getler, "You'd think it would be the simplest thing in the world. But almost everybody got it wrong." He adds, "Please don't take these—exercises—out of context. They really do show you very graphically that things are not what they seem."

In the wake of this revolutionary conversion, the paper's elder executives are eager to do more. Starting in mid-September, the next cohort of *Post* managers will submit to diversity training. Then, a few months later, all the paper's reporters may have to do the same. "We're not going to go around here with a cat-o'-nine-tails," says Kaiser. "But people see something coming like the Getler operation and they say, 'Oh God, let me hide under my desk.' Well, we want to get those people out from under their desk. We want them to participate. We think they could learn a lot." Asked if he would compel participation, Getler responds, "It's a fair question." In the end, he says, he thinks he will. "Everyone here has diversity problems," he reasons.

If the *Post* does decide to make sensitivity training compulsory, not just for managers but for reporters as well, it will be going a step beyond other papers that have adopted the practice. Already, many *Post* reporters are talking mutiny. "You want diversity? Fine, have diversity," says one reporter. "Just don't waste my time with stupid psychobabble game-playing." Says another: "I find the whole idea juvenile and offensive. If someone tells me to put on a sign like that, I'll tell them to shove it up their ass." Even minority journalists are wary, suspecting a re-

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education camp atmosphere. "You're talking about a lot of people who are sort of professionally cynical about everything," says Roberto Suro, a deputy editor on the *Post*'s National desk. "Reporters are not touchy-feely. We tend not to like talking about ourselves. If you force people into these kinds of things, they get their backs up."

Internal frictions over diversity are hardly unique to newspapers. Tendentious "sensitivity" campaigns have divided many organizations in recent years, from Fortune 500 companies to the federal government. In a sense, then, the *Post* is like any big company struggling to come to grips with racial change.

But the *Post* is not just any company. Newspapers exist to challenge and unsettle public sensibilities, not to pander to them. And when this vital institution is hampered in that mission, the consequences are felt far beyond the institution itself. A newspaper's mandate—to be an arbiter of truth, an enemy of euphemism, a check on social complacency—is directly at odds with the ideology of diversity management, with its ethos of sensitivity and conflict avoidance at all costs. In other words, when diversity consultants move from the boardroom into the newsroom, the integrity of newspapers is compromised in fundamental and revealing ways.

The first law of diversity training is that "we are all biased," condemned to view the world through the prism of our own prejudices. Gonzales, in adapting his practice to the newsroom, has given this hardy perennial a new twist. Just as we are all racist, all stories are racist. "I have met very few people in my wanderings who intentionally did things to reinforce stereotypes," he says. "They say, 'Hey, what's the problem? It's good journalism. I want to be provocative.' " According to Gonzales, it's not that simple. "All human beings have biases," he explains. "With that said, all stories are biased. That's why you've got to weave diversity training into writing training."

III.

But it's unclear how sensitivity training can be "woven" into a profession which has traditionally held that reporters should tell the truth as they see it, without fear or favor. Public reaction, hostile or not, is not supposed to be anticipated and muted in the editing process but embraced as a healthy consequence of the search for truth, since the charge of bias is best dealt with in the marketplace of ideas.

In this regard, diversity journalism is of a piece with "community journalism," a new, feel-good school of newspapering whose premise is that editors should let readers' comfort level dictate the boundaries of their coverage. And so race alone is not responsible for the new ethos of the *Post*. To some degree, the paper is now engaging in equal-opportunity pandering, talking down to the black urban community in the same way that it's increasingly talking down to the white suburban community. "There's a hundred-year tradition of powerful journalism upsetting middle-class Americans," says a high-level *Post* editor unhappy with the trend. "Today, with the rise of a black middle class, some of the middle-class people we offend are going to be black. What I'm trying to suggest is that diversity in the newsroom is a subset of the larger issue of middle-class America sort of being upset about what journalists do and papers increasingly caving to them. And a whole philosophy growing up, as far as I'm concerned, to rationalize the cave."

Although top editors are undoubtedly sincere in their commitment to diversity, there is also a financial basis for the new skittishness. As Bob Kaiser points out, the *Post*'s penetration in its market is broader than almost any other major newspaper's. "We have a bigger black readership than any metropolitan paper in America," he says. "And we're extremely proud of it." Citing a bale of "positive" reportage about African Americans, Kaiser adds: "There are powerful business reasons for making sure we're staying connected to those people, writing about their world."

These efforts to reach out to groups previously absent from news coverage can be unobjectionable, praiseworthy, even necessary. The problem occurs when sensitivity to "community reaction" takes priority over the need to report aggressively on painful social problems. This is a special temptation in Washington, with its large coterie of upscale black professionals. "Our black middle-class readers are very sophisticated," says reporter Jacqueline Trescott, who has been with the *Post* for twenty years. "They resent being identified with the underclass. They care about minority progress and achievement being highlighted.... If the problem stories are not balanced with solution stories or success stories, it becomes a real challenge for the paper to maintain credibility."

Thanks in part to these pressures, the *Post*'s coverage of the majority-black city in which it is located has grown increasingly timorous and protective over the past decade. Aggressive coverage of the social pathologies at the heart of Washington's black underclass—chronic welfare dependence, adolescent childbearing, neighborhood crime and violence—has increasingly given way to human-interest puffery. "MAKING THE MCSCENE—SOUTHEAST MICKEY D'S IS THE LATE-NIGHT PLACE TO CRUISE," chirped a front-page story on July 18. "Police said that other than occasional fights [and] a few people engaging in low-level drug dealing ... the scene is largely mellow." An April 9 story touted the virtues of the newly opened Foxtrappe Private Towne Club, where Washington's "educated and affluent African-Americans" can "rub elbows, use gold credit cards and exchange business cards." Meanwhile, reporter Katherine Boo's outstanding—and empathetic—story on delinquent black girls languished in the *Post*'s computer system for over a month amid concerns that it wasn't "upbeat" enough.

Stories about controversial black leaders tend to be blandly upbeat to the point of sycophancy. A pre-election profile of Cora Masters Barry praised her Afrocentric take on life. "CORA BARRY, STANDING FIRM," gushed the headine. "MARION'S WIFE KNOWS WHO SHE IS." The paper's sympathetic treatment of Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan has also been peculiar. After receiving the minister cordially for a two-hour on-the-record chat—during which he ranted repeatedly about Jewish

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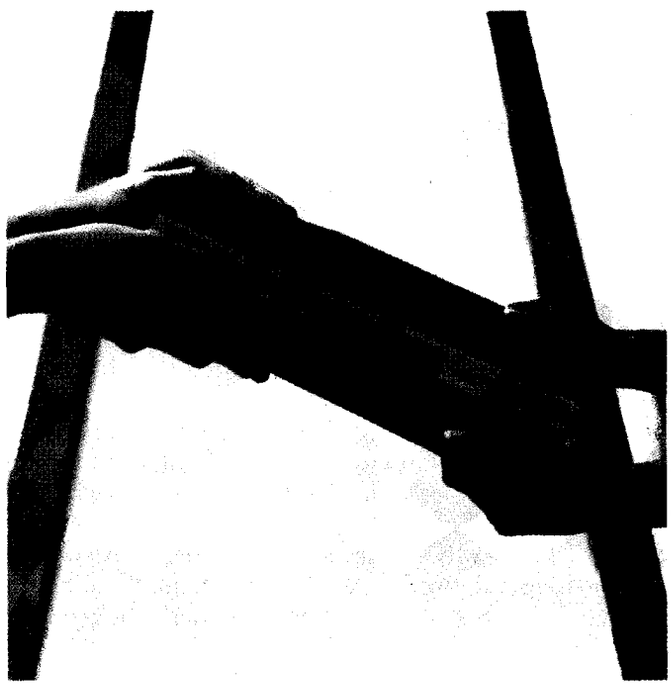
control of the media—reporters and editors assigned Nathan McCall, who had converted to Islam while in prison, to write it up. Although the front-page story acknowledged that "many of the questions and much of Farrakhan's talk dealt with his reportedly disparaging references to Jews and Judaism," McCall suspended his journalistic skepticism and generously gave the minister the benefit of the doubt: "Farrakhan expressed a desire for the media to 'print the truth' about him and his message.... He said that as a spiritual leader, he is concerned about the welfare of the entire nation."

To many in the newsroom, this good-news barrage, in the face of the city's moral and fiscal meltdown, has a saccharine quality to it. "Pick up the Sunday magazine these days," grumbles a disgruntled *Post* editor. "Every third issue, there's some black family on the cover, and then inside, a hacky sentimental story about what a wonderful, struggling black family this is. And they have kids! And they go to school! And they actually celebrate Christmas together! ... I agree we need to do stories about things that are working. The problem is that a lot of the stories we do about a black middle-class family struggling but surviving are sickly sweet and you can see right through them." As *Post* columnist Juan Williams points out, this triumphalist focus on black advancement is not only misleading, but irresponsible. "We're trying to be understanding and sensitive and politically correct about our dealings with black people," he says. "When in fact, the people who suffer the most as a consequence of the *Post*'s actions tend to be poor black people, because they end up with a government that is badly run and lacks in accountability and does not provide basic services. And I think the *Post* just needs to be a good newspaper and expose the kind of abuses that are foisted by black officials on black people living in the city."



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But black journalists like Williams run the risk of being labeled gutless traitors. Consider the case of Leon Dash—a driven, brilliant journalist who has long concentrated his reporting on the least attractive features of black Washington. In 1986, his exceptional *Post* series on the teenage pregnancy epidemic among inner-city black youths punctured the conventional liberal wisdom that the crisis of black teenage parents was simply one of ignorance about birth control. Dash was one of the first reporters to note that for underclass pubescent girls, "a child was a tangible achievement in otherwise dreary and empty lives."

In October of 1994, the *Post* devoted eight days to Dash's "Rosa Lee" series, which probed the intertwined pathologies of a three-generational family of black, welfare-dependent petty criminals. The riveting series examined the intractability of underclass poverty, crime and drug use across generations. It won Dash a Pulitzer. Many black *Post* reporters, however, read the series with dismay. "I didn't like the Rosa Lee stories," says Kevin Merida. "We spend too much time in journalism chronicling failure and despair. Is this what we have to do to win a prize? Write about black pathology? I just don't know what good a series like that does."

Black reporters' complaints about the series prompted an anguished round of brown-bag lunches and assemblies, in which top *Post* editors defended themselves against the charge of conspiring to besmirch the black community. Downie issued a flurry of penitent memos, promising to redouble his efforts to publish "solutions stories." Dash, meanwhile, has been made a newsroom pariah. "Since the series came out, black people at the *Post* have shunned me," he says. "They are still shunning me." Dash says the brown-bag lunches were unpleasant experiences for him. "People kept asking me, why didn't I focus on Rhodes scholars and college graduates? Why didn't I focus on people who have overcome these situations? Well, because those people aren't part of the generation that is trapped in this permanent underclass."

Unfortunately, reporters like Leon Dash may be a dying breed, given the climate of victimism and aggrievement that prevails in today's newsrooms. For a glimpse of the paper of the future, consider the fifty-eight-page instruction book on "Content Audits," published by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. The brochure instructs editors to map their coverage out on a grid and compute "total number items," "total minority items," "percent minority"; and to rate stories "P" for positive ("Shows minorities smiling [unless text contradicts smile], achieving, in respected role, etc."), "N for Negative" ("the old arrest shot or other negative roles") or just "Neutral." ("Daily life. Not bad or good.") To "reap the rewards of the audit," papers are urged to "develop a pool of senior-level minority editors who can sit in on news editorial meetings and flag insensitive stories or narrowly focused pictures."

At the *Post*, the commandment to avoid offense at all costs dovetails conveniently with a long history of timo-

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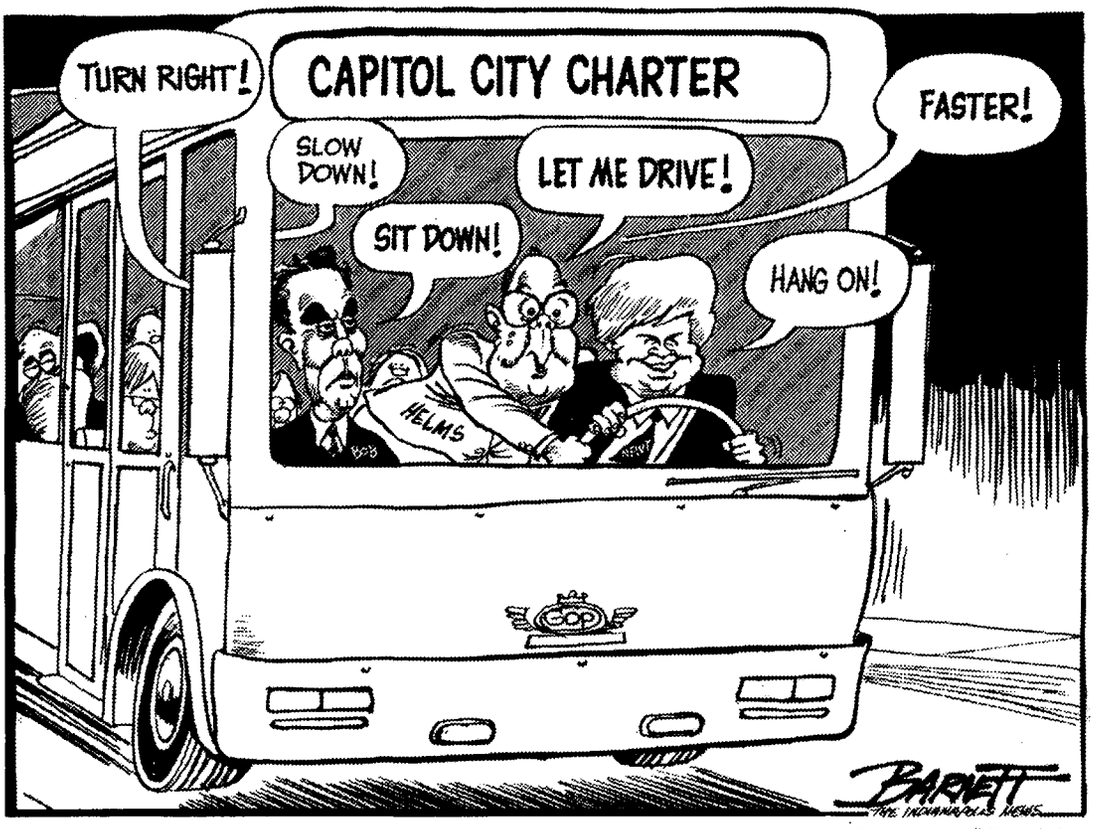

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rousness about racial matters. Over the years, for example, the paper has taken many hits for its tortured coverage of Mayor Marion Barry. Though the *Post* pleaded Barry's case in three glowing editorial endorsements—in '78, '82 and '86—Barry continues to pillory the paper as part of a white conspiracy to harass him. Then, of course, there's the '86 magazine boycott, the impact of which should not be underestimated. "I've come across a number of stories in my career where that incident was mentioned," says one *Post* reporter. " 'Change this, tone this down, do this, do that.' There is a feeling that if we say anything more complex than 'The sun rises in the East,' we step in shit."

In a memo circulated in December to the paper's editors, Joann Byrd, the *Post*'s ombudsman, elaborated on this theme. "The distance between the paper and many in the black community is an enormous and difficult challenge for the *Post*," she wrote. "It is the prism through which a huge segment of the population sees all the paper's reporting—and judges it to be indifferent or racist." Byrd's concerns were reflected in the Getler report, which concluded that one of the best ways to ensure responsible minority coverage was "to have minority editors to help steer us in a positive direction in our coverage of issues involving minorities."

At the *Post*, that burden rests squarely on the shoulders of Milton Coleman, assistant managing editor for Metropolitan News. In *Volunteer Slavery*, Jill Nelson refers to him as the *Post*'s "spook gatekeeper"—and that does seem to be what *Post* Publisher Donald Graham had in mind when he handpicked Coleman as his Metro editor in 1986. After interviewing six candidates for the job, Bradlee and Downie had settled on Kevin Klose, an editor on the National desk who is now the head of Radio Free Europe. But in an unusual move, Donald Graham overruled them. "He said, 'Uh, guys, you made the wrong choice,'" recalls an editor. " 'The next Metro editor's gonna be Milton Coleman.' "

Coleman's purview has been expanding ever since. "Milton Coleman has enormous power here," says one *Post* reporter. "The top editors here are all guilty white liberals who want to do the right thing and are very unsure of themselves. So Milton has enormous moral force." Juan Williams explains how this works in practice. "Every story that's racially sensitive gets run by him," he says. "The top editors have encouraged him to look at stuff, so he does. Unfortunately, there are lots of reporters who have complained over the years that their aggressive instincts have been muted by his editing." In one notorious incident, Coleman refused to let a reporter refer to Louis Farrakhan as controversial. "Milton said we could not say, 'Louis Farakkhan, the controversial minister from the Nation of Islam,' " recalls a *Post* staffer, formerly of the City desk. "He made us take out the word 'controversial.' He kept saying, 'You can't say that about him, you can't say that about him. . . .' Well, if we couldn't say he was controversial, what could we say?"

Over the years, Coleman has distinguished himself as a reporter and editor by his honorable behavior in tight spots. As Janet Cooke's editor on her objectionable "Jimmy" story, he courageously took full responsibility for one of the most notorious screw-ups in journalism. "I think, if I can gore my own ox, [everyone] kind of took it for granted that Coleman should know" whether the story presented an accurate picture, he told the *Post*'s ombudsman, Bill Green. In 1984, Coleman took on the most prominent black leader in the country when he told a fellow *Post* reporter that Jesse Jackson had referred to Jews as "Hymies" in private conversation. Though the mention was buried in the thirty-fourth paragraph of the reporter's story, the disclosure hit the Jackson campaign like an earthquake. Jackson, furious, insisted the reference had been off the record, and Coleman was vilified as a traitor within the black community.

Coleman's coverage of local black leaders, with whom he is socially close, has been less fearsome. After joining the *Post* in 1976, Coleman went to work on the City desk, where his germinal reporting experience was covering the glamorous, dashiki-clad activist and City Council member Marion Barry. Barry was a much more dynamic figure back then, and Coleman's coverage was celebratory. "Many blacks feel that a part of their own future is wrapped up in Marion Barry's success as mayor," Coleman wrote at the time. "He is a symbol—the most visible symbol—of those blacks who grew up in the '60s, began to achieve status, affluence and power in the '70s, and don't want to lose it in the '80s."

Coleman became Metro editor just as Barry's nighttime escapades were beginning to attract serious notice in the paper. "Milton was coming home to Metro," recalls Art Brisbane, a former *Post* Metro editor now editing *The Kansas City Star*. "He had covered Barry. He knew the District political scene extremely well. He was coming home in a position of really significant influence. He saw the Barry situation and just intuited an opportunity to improve the relationship between the newspaper and the mayor." Coleman explains his decision simply. "One day, I had lunch with the mayor. . . . Afterwards, I told Len that, as somebody who read *The Washington Post* pretty regularly since 1982, the guy I had lunch with was a much more sophisticated, astute politician than the guy we had been portraying, and that part of my mission would be to change that. And Len agreed with me."

But other reporters were bothered by the degree to which Coleman became socially close to Barry and other black city officials. During a routine staff meeting around that period, reporters erupted, according to several in attendance, claiming Coleman had a racial agenda. "People felt that stuff was being held, watered down, refocused," said one Metro reporter. "And one of the things that Milton said during that meeting was, 'Look, you know, I have to answer to these people. These people are my neighbors and friends. And you guys are a bunch of white folks, you don't know what I'm talking about, but I live in black Washington.' It just shocked people. We felt

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like those people, Charlene Drew Jarvis, whoever, were calling the tune." And, indeed, it was after Coleman's arrival on the City desk that the *Post*'s coverage of the Barry administration changed perceptibly. "The city was roiling," recalls a Metro editor. "There was a stepped-up investigation of Barry. The *Post* had ratcheted up its coverage. There were rumors that he was taking drugs, that his administration was corrupt, that people were being paid off. Suddenly those stories became very, very hard to get in the paper."

Coleman soon developed a reputation in the newsroom for quashing stories critical not only of Barry, but of other black city leaders. Here are some of the more notorious examples:

• In early 1987, Barry's interference with city contracting was the focus of an investigation into his administration conducted by the U.S. Attorney. Before the investigation had even begun, *Post* reporter Sharon LaFranier had filed a long story about how the D.C. government's minority contracting program was enriching cronies of the mayor. "It was a great story," says then-City editor Rem Rieder. "But Milton hated it.... He went through and identified thirty or forty specific things that he had a problem with. Sharon went back and tried to address every one of them. Then he came up with new concerns. After a while, we got the sense that this was something he just didn't want in the paper." A watered-down version of the article finally ran—*after* the election, and after *The Washington Times* had already gotten there first.

• In 1987, Metro reporter Karlyn Barker discovered that the city's annual Riverfest was turning into a personal bacchanalia for the mayor at the city's expense. A band of Riverfest committee members marched into the *Post* and confronted Coleman, arguing that Barker had gotten it wrong, that the story shouldn't run. (Ironically, one of the people in the meeting, going through the motions for appearance's sake, had been Barker's source for the story.) Coleman sat on the piece for weeks, running a weakened version only after the Riverfest committee had held a pre-emptive press conference announcing changes. "I was so on the money," Barker, now at *The Orange County Register*, recalls. "The *Post* sat on the story until the city's defense was out, then led with the city's defense. I was furious."

• Also in 1987, Barker learned that Barry's ex-wife, Mary Treadwell, who was sent to prison for stealing funds from a city housing project, had been released and immediately granted a $28,000-a-year job with the city parole board. Rieder, Barker's editor at the time, excitedly brought the story to the news editor, where it was slated for page one. The *Post* editorial page prepared an accompanying editorial. When Coleman got wind of these developments, he said, according to Rieder, "That's not a story." Coleman went to complain to Downie, and the series didn't run on page one. It didn't run at all. Three days later, after other news outlets deemed the revelation a story and all hell had broken loose, the *Post* finally ran a brief item on page D5 in its "Update on the News" column.

Coleman disputes the facts of none of these instances. In the case of the first two, he says his motives have been misread: "The pieces did not fail to appear for reasons of race." In the case of the Mary Treadwell incident, he admits to "underplaying" the story. "In retrospect, my news judgment was wrong," he says.

In the late '80s, as Barry's nightly indulgences became common knowledge, Coleman went to war with his City editor, Mary Jo Meisner. Meisner pushed consistently for more aggressive coverage of the mayor, and reporters say that it was a terrible time on the Metro desk. "Remember how difficult this would be for him," says one Metro reporter. "These are mostly white reporters, going on TV, getting good strokes at *The Washington Post*, getting known, getting famous, by pointing out on the front page of *The Washington Post* the human frailties of a proud black man and his administration. This was supposed to be the new African American political class. Fourteen, fifteen years after they take power from the white aristocracy, it's all going down the drain. And Mary Jo is shouldering Milton aside and controlling the coverage. It really contributed to a lot of the tension between the two of them." After the trial, Meisner quit, complaining that Coleman too often viewed stories through a racial prism—"killing, dismembering and soft-pedaling" coverage of Barry and his friends, she told *Regardie's*.

When it came to Barry's comeback campaign in 1994, the *Post*'s coverage was, if anything, more uncritical than before. "Nonexistent," one reporter calls it. "A farce," says another. "It's amazing how little context we provided for readers." How did the paper that had broken Watergate miss the story of political corruption right under its nose? The *Post* media critic, Howard Kurtz, says: "I would not dispute the notion that coverage of Barry, particularly after the primary, was weird. We just could have done a better job. And there you could argue that we were feeling somewhat sensitive, especially since Barry was openly running against the *Post* as a part of the white power structure."

Midway through the campaign, Barry announced that his constituency was able to overlook his many transgressions because blacks were more forgiving than Jews. "You never saw it in the daily paper," says one bitter *Post* reporter. When Barry surrounded himself with old cronies like Roy Littlejohn and Ivanhoe Donaldson, both of whom had served time for their corruption in previous Barry administrations, the *Post* didn't report that, either. When city residents called the *Post*, offering tips about how Barry was paying voters to turn out for him, how he was giving homeless people alcohol, sending checks to outside wards, "those tips were not valiantly investigated," says one *Post* editor. "The old college try was not put at it, and I don't know why." On January 3, Barry was sworn in as mayor. "As Barry spoke, a jubilant crowd of 2,000 supporters cheered, applauded and stomped their feet, giving the inauguration ceremony the feel of a victorious basketball game or a revival meeting," wrote the *Post*. "The new mayor called on District citizens to unify behind him and believe that their battered city could

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accomplish the impossible."

Milton Coleman's office is decorated with Boy Scout paraphernalia and posters of black Olympians. Sitting atop his television set is a mirrored chrome sculpture of the word "NO." He sits in granite stillness as I query him about his editorial philosophy. When he speaks, his voice exudes a quiet authority. "Any story we do, I think: What is the first thing that people who want to criticize us are going to say?" he says. "And are we going to leave ourselves open to valid criticism? I want our stories to be as bulletproof as possible. And that has nothing to do with race." I ask him about the relationship between diversity and coverage. "I don't see diversity as a cultural experiment," he says. "The reality of the world is not overwhelmingly a white, male reality. There's no need to diversify the newsroom if it's not going to influence coverage."

Coleman gives an example of what he is talking about—a 1994 series written by Keith Harriston, a black reporter, and his white editor, Mary Pat Flaherty, on rampant corruption in the D.C. police department. "Law and Disorder—the District's Troubled Police" was a finalist for a Pulitzer. "That was a series that, had we been saying, 'We don't want black folks,' would not have been written." he says. "So diversity translated into coverage." But wait a minute. Three years earlier, hadn't Coleman killed a piece that predicted and decried precisely the problems Harriston documented? And wasn't the piece written by a white reporter, Sari Horwitz? Coleman shakes his head. "I'm not going to discuss how we edit the paper with your readers," he says. "All I will say is that Sari Horwitz's report was never published because it was never completed. And it was never completed for a host of reasons. Some of which had to do with her editors' time. Some of which had to do with Sari's time."

Others see it differently. "Milton kept placing obstacles in its way," says a *Post* editor. "It was the equivalent of placing 100,000 tasks in front of you. Well, you haven't proven this. You haven't asked that. This was an explosive, fascinating, well-done series. And his reaction was completely negative and extremely discouraging."

Horwitz's story was about the D.C. police department's hiring binge, which she termed "a disaster in the making." Scrambling to meet a looming congressional deadline, the department was having trouble finding qualified candidates to fill the number of slots. As a result, Horwitz wrote in her story, critical background checks were being cut short. Cops who failed to meet minimum residency requirements were being hired anyway—cops who couldn't read, couldn't write, couldn't understand cause and effect. Unfortunately for Horwitz's story, almost all of the problem cops, due to the residency requirement, happened to be black. Though Horwitz had quoted both white cops and black veteran cops denouncing the lowered standards, Milton "hated the piece," says an editor. "He was concerned about community reaction. He thought it would look like the *Post* was piling on."

By 1993, Horwitz's class of crooked cops was out on the streets. It wasn't long before they were being arrested in droves, for crimes ranging from shoplifting to rape and murder. Horwitz turned over her notes to Keith Harriston.

During a seminar on investigative reporting last month, Coleman praised the Harriston piece as an example of the stellar investigative reporting coming off the City desk. The reporters and editors in the room, many of whom knew the tangled tale of Horwitz's piece, were "aghast," said one attendee. Finally, the tensions that had been simmering beneath the surface boiled over. Steve Luxenberg, assistant managing editor for Investigative (reporting), spoke up. "The rumor was that Milton killed that piece because he was trying to protect his friend Ike Fulwood," Luxenberg mused to the group. Fulwood had been the police chief at the time of Horwitz's squelched series. Coleman denied the charge; but Deputy Investigative Editor Marilyn Thompson jumped in. "Wait a minute, Milton," Thompson reportedly said, "What's the real story here? People have said the story was killed because of race." Coleman denied that charge as well; but when pressed by editors for the precise reason why the piece was killed, "he never did give a satisfactory answer," says one who was present. "People thought it was pretty outrageous for him to bring up Keith Harriston's piece. Sure, now that these cops are out there and it's come to light, we finally wrote about it. But we could have prevented it."

Coleman's reputation for racial protectiveness used to be a sore spot at the *Post.* "Len and I have dealt with this complaint more than once over the years," Kaiser admits. In 1986, after Coleman had killed one too many stories, prompting a revolt on the City desk, Downie and Kaiser chewed him out. "They made it clear that whatever you're doing, you can't do it this way; that you don't want a mutiny of your top reporters," recalls one high-level *Post* editor. "Milton had to pull back a little bit and be not quite as interventionist and outrageous."

But today, Coleman's anxieties more closely coincide with the *Post*'s sensibilities. What used to be known as squelching or gutting stories has become "sensitivity" to the "community." "As an African American," says Bob Kaiser, "Milton gives us real sensitivity and adequate representation." Says Leonard Downie admiringly: "Milton tends to look at stories from about five or six different directions. It's not just a sense of journalistic responsibility, but a responsibility to the city, a responsibility to the community.... He's helped us understand a lot of things."

Rather than taking reporters who complain about Coleman seriously, the top *Post* management blame their grievances on racism, to be corrected through diversity training. "I wouldn't want to be quoted saying this about my own staff," one top *Post* editor told me. "But I think there is a certain amount of, 'Who is this big black dude telling me my story's not good enough?' I can't read minds or psychoanalyze. But I think what Mike [Getler] is doing will help to change that." "People are always misreading my motives," agrees Coleman. "That's why we're

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talking these issues out in the newsroom."

These internecine squabbles would be no more than gossip for newsroom groupies, were it not for the tangible consequences: the *Post* has become a paper that too often mistells or misses stories. Call it no-fault journalism. "If a story has to do with race, the process is made very cumbersome," says James Ragland, a former *Post* City Hall reporter now at *The Dallas Morning News*, who quit the paper in frustration after the '94 mayoral campaign. "Stories that should get in the paper without any trouble become much more difficult. I understand the need to be sensitive, but it goes overboard, to the point where the journalistic function is compromised." Ragland, who is black, points out that the *Post*'s squeamishness has a perverse result: most of the victims of black officials' mismanagement of public housing, jails and schools are themselves black.

Other reporters complain that their aggressive instincts are being stifled by the *Post*'s obsessive race consciousness. "I wanted to do a piece on D.C.'s minority set-aside program, which is a total and complete boondoggle. Six big firms in D.C. get all the money," says one reporter. But the reporter has decided not to. "I thought to myself: Oh God, do I want to do this, knowing the hassle they're going to put me through?... And then I thought, forget it. The hoops I'd have to get through to put that story in the paper could be career-threatening."

Coleman is far from the only *Post* editor killing pieces these days. Sensitivity is infectious. In early 1993, Metro reporter Sandra Evans spent months following around a Prince George's County social worker, meticulously documenting the neglect and abuse that goes on in the social service system. She told the story from the point of view of the social worker. Unfortunately, the social worker was white, and all the kids were black. When the story got done, her editors wouldn't run it. "They told her straight out, the problem with this piece is it looks like a white woman imposing her values on this black world." Evans defends her choice of a white social worker—"She was enthusiastic and personable"—but says that she understands her editors' objections. "The paper's trying very hard to make sure that people see the diversity of the people around us, and not judge them by subjective standards," she says. "And ultimately, if you're white and middle class, you're going to see the world through white, middle-class eyes."

In the new, post-sensitivity era, even pictures are gerrymandered. In 1994, Susie Linfield, then the Arts editor of the paper, wanted to run, on the cover of the Sunday Arts section, a picture of two black women dancing with a local band. The picture was supposed to accompany a story about the Northeast Groovers, a local go-go group. But Style editor Mary Hadar and assignment editor Alona Wartofsky objected vehemently. They insisted it was racist to show black women wearing tight clothing and dancing. Linfield recalls being surprised by their reaction. The picture was an unstaged documentary shoot, taken by a black photographer and approved by a black photo editor. Hadar and Wortofsky complained to Kaiser, who, in an angry meeting, accused Linfield of "endangering the paper" with her racial insensitivity. Linfield, now a visiting professor at New York University, remains somewhat amused by the drama. "The *Post*'s attitude toward blacks is basically that of a parent toward a crazy child: 'Don't upset them.' The *Post* sees it as enlightenment, but it's really just another form of racism, because it's based on condescension and fear. It's normally intelligent people getting thrown into a frenzy of defensiveness and losing all perspective."

Linfield's editors, of course, see the episode differently. "Susie liked dramatic images," says Kaiser. "But there was a strong feeling that showing semi-clad, sweaty women jiving like this was, ah, not representative of the world of the Northeast Groovers. So the picture was journalistically misleading." "Sure, race was part of the discussion," agrees Mary Hadar. "But I don't think we were overreacting."

After encountering the racial strife at *The Washington Post*, it's tempting to despair that major American institutions will ever achieve both racial integration and racial harmony. If the *Post*, which tries so hard and means so well, is failing so dramatically to achieve its goals, what hope is there for the rest of us?

"When racial things come up in this newsroom, we should talk about them," says Len Downie. "We should not run away from them. We ought to talk about them." In fact, the more everyone talks, the worse everyone feels. "It's a truism in this world of diversity training that things get worse before they get better," says David Ignatius hopefully. "And maybe that's what we're seeing. When people are talking about issues that are really painful, you're not going to hear violins start playing."

By focusing obsessively on the ideals and the instruments of diversity, by exhorting its staff to reflect endlessly on their own resentments, the *Post* is ensuring that the resentments will never be transcended. Not every pain has to be shared. At the *Post* today, pain has been promoted into a norm, a credential, a personal and professional qualification. David Nicholson, a black assistant editor on the *Post*'s book review, puts it well. "I wish that everybody would just shut up and do their jobs, and quit bitching about how badly they're treated because they're gay, how badly they're treated because they're a woman, how badly they're treated because they're black. If everyone just shut up and did their jobs, we could have the best goddamn paper in the country. But we're too busy aping the fragmentation of the larger society. And I don't think any good's going to come of it."

Indifference is not always a bad thing. Sometimes it denotes neutrality and a desire for objectivity. In recent years it has become fashionable to criticize objectivity, to attack it as a mask for interests. For journalists, however, such a view is dangerous. If objectivity is not possible, then journalism is not possible. And a newspaper's indifference to the subjects of its coverage is the sign of a newspaper's integrity. Or so it used to be. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Controlled Substances

Spike Lee has often been chided for underplaying the subject of drugs in black America. Now he has made something that more than amends. **Clockers** (Universal) begins with close-ups of corpses, all young black males, murdered in the drug life.

We're told that the screen rights to Richard Price's novel were purchased for Martin Scorsese. Scorsese became committed elsewhere. He remained as co-producer here, but he passed the book on to Lee. It's interesting to speculate about the film that Scorsese might have made, but it's fine to have Lee's film—accomplished, strong, explosive.

The screenplay, by Lee and Price, moves the setting from New Jersey, just across the river from Manhattan, to Lee's own turf, Brooklyn, just across a different river from Manhattan. The story has of course been condensed, and I condense it here further. Strike, a 19-year-old black youth living in the projects, is a clocker (a low-level drug dealer who, to make a go of it, must work around the clock). He gets involved in a murder. His older brother, a non-criminal, also gets involved.

A homicide detective named Rocco Klein is on the case. Tough as he thinks he needs to be, he nonetheless develops a sort of avuncular affection for Strike. The youth's many troubles are complicated by an ulcer, which perforates. Through all the complications—yet hardly with Strike's cooperation—Klein watches over him. Finally the murder business is cleared up, somewhat neatly, and Klein heads Strike out of town toward a possible new life. The film ends as it began, with murder.

Other characters throng through, most of them black youths in Strike's circle, most of them sellers or users of drugs. But story, as usually deployed in suspense and climax, is a lesser element of the film. It chiefly serves as a conduit through which lives flow past.

Price knew when he wrote the book and Lee knew when he took it on that the story as such was not only gruesomely commonplace in life, it was banal in film. Price dug into new layers of verity and depended not on narrative but on intensity derived from the verity to make the book jump. Lee, too, had to know that the successful being of the film depended on what he did with it, not on what it handed him.

Lee had a great advantage over Price. The book is brash and jarring, but formally it's another naturalistic novel coursing along. For Lee, the work becomes prismatic. As a novel could not be and Price's certainly isn't, the film is broken into jagged yet accommodated fragments—segments that hit one another like colliding atoms.

With his cinematographer Malik Hassan Sayeed and his editor Sam Pollard, Lee uses different visual textures, different color registers—particularly for flashbacks and corollary matters—to keep us from settling back and just watching. Partly this pyrotechnical process can be ascribed to Lee's ego: he wants us always to note that this is not just another drug flick. (He includes, too, some of his stylistic hallmarks, like the occasional sliding of the camera and its subject on the same dolly. And there's one huge close-up of a single eye.) But most of it is absolutely authentic: the message bursts into the medium.

Yet there's a paradox. Winding through the fireworks is a filament that binds the film to general contemporary viewing experience: the way that Lee edits much of the straight narrative. The evening before I saw *Clockers*, I saw an episode of "NYPD Blue" on TV. The editing of the TV show was a good deal like what I saw the next day in many of the narrative sequences in *Clockers*—different strands of the story were like express trains rushing past one another at switch points. Seeing this style again in Lee's film was like getting a zeitgeist confirmation.

But—a big but—in *Clockers* that style seems differently employed. In the TV show, as in many other TV shows, the editing has only one imperative: don't give the viewer a chance to get bored. *Clockers* has a more subtle, sophisticated intent. Lee encircles the modern TV-and-viewer relationship, outflanks the fear-of-boredom imperative and includes this hot-breath method as part of What Is. The desperate rhythms seem part of the world he is uncovering, the world he is pitying.

And of course as part of the transmutation of the novel into film, Lee has what no novelist could have: music. Rap is only one of the several modes that beat the picture along like a child rolling a hoop. The original score by Terence Blanchard, studded with other numbers, becomes almost a physical feature of the experience.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Country Life. *Michael Blakemore wrote, directed and acts in this version of* Uncle Vanya *set in the Australian outback. Some rewards, especially Sam Neill as "Astrov" and Kerry Fox as "Sonya." (Reviewed 9/11/95)* **Living in Oblivion.** *Tom DiCillo, a writer-director of low-budget features, wrote and directed this low-budget feature about his travails. Very funny. (8/21&28/95)* **My Life and Times with Antonin Artaud.** *An exceptionally delicate rendering of the poet-philosopher-director-madman's last two years, Paris 1946-48. (8/14/95)* **The Net.** *A mainstream thriller, but it does have some thrills. Sandra Bullock, as a computer analyst who gets in bad trouble by analyzing too well, is a star on the rise. (8/21&28/95)*—**SK**

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Mekhi Phifer, a newcomer, plays Strike with a corkscrew ungainliness that suggests both victim and rebel. He doesn't work for pathos, he leaves that to us. Isaiah Washington, as his older brother, is less successful: at times he seems to be merely presenting what he ought to be generating. Delroy Lindo, familiar from *Malcolm X* and *Crooklyn*, plays Strike's drug boss who treats the youth like a son and heir, which produces difficulties for both. Lindo crams the man with different sorts of hatred of the world, with relish for different kinds of vengeance.

Harvey Keitel, who plays Rocco Klein, is by now as much a phenomenon as an actor. This is not only because he appears in so many films but because he seems unequipped to be so continually interesting. The face, voice, manner promise much less than he delivers. He almost seems to be saying, "OK, I don't look or sound like an actor. So what? Watch *this*." Then we find ourselves enmeshed by his energy, his vernacular force. In such monstrosities as *The Piano* and *The Bad Lieutenant*, Keitel was inescapably monstrous; but in *Smoke* his performance was acutely inflected, and here he convinces completely as a pro who doesn't stop being a pro even when he has sympathy for the suspect.

John Turturro, well established as an actor of range, plays Keitel's detective partner, a minor role distinguished only by the fact that he calls blacks "Nubians." Presumably Turturro is in the part out of loyalty to Lee, for whom he has played much better parts.

A closing query. *Clockers* is about the curse of drugs on a sector of society that is especially vulnerable to them. Yet Lee tags this film, as he has tagged all his films, A Spike Lee Joint. How humorous can that tag continue to be? •

Jed Perl on Art

Jazz Age Pastoral

Kids who dream of being artists when they grow up have no clear sense of where the solitary making-something-out-of-nothing aspect of the artist's life ends and the freewheeling community aspect of the artist's life begins. They see the artist as a romantic figure in a romantic setting, and that image may be so indelibly marked in their minds, and may retain so much of the comforting force of primal fantasy, that they still believe in it as adults, long after logic or experience has told them that it isn't so. Watteau is probably the only artist who's made masterpieces out of a grown-up's against-all-odds insistence on the fantastic idea that there's a seamless unity between the art, the artist and the artist's life; he made his case by analogy, using a steely delicacy and veiled yet unsparing irony to paint actors and musicians for whom being on stage and being off stage are one and the same thing. But there are artists with not a hundredth of Watteau's tarnished-silver poetry who've also made something charming out of this Peter Pan view of *la vie bohème*, and certainly what attracts people to the paintings that Florine Stettheimer was doing in New York in the '20s and '30s is the fun of seeing a Watteauish kind of easygoing bohemian elegance reframed in twentieth-century terms.

Stettheimer isn't a painter with whom people are generally familiar. The retrospective that's up at the Whitney Museum until November is the first museum show in New York since a memorial exhibition was held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946, two years after her death. But what Stettheimer lacks in name recognition is more than made up by the intensity of feeling that she's inspired from her time down to our own among a narrow band of admirers who recognize her jazz-age pastoral fantasies as precisely their own.

Stettheimer was always inclined to feel that the best audience for her work was an audience of friends, and although she exhibited in group shows she turned down a number of offers for gallery exhibitions, preferring to unveil new paintings at teas in her double-height studio in the Beaux Arts Building at 80 West 40th Street, overlooking Bryant Park. The critic Henry McBride—who wrote about her work, became a friend and then found himself writing about paintings in which he himself was portrayed—reported that Stettheimer's paintings could be seen as the models for her studio decor, with its "lofty windows ... hung with billowy cellophane curtains," its "chairs and tables ... in white and gold," its "lamps screened with white beads and unreal but handsome gilt flowers." Stettheimer filled her canvases with portraits of artist- and writer- and art critic-friends—they included, along with McBride, Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Stieglitz, Elie Nadelman, Charles Demuth and Carl Van Vechten. And these friends looked into the paintings, which functioned as elaborately stylized funhouse mirrors, and were delighted (and sometimes disarmed) to find that they appeared thinner, more seductive, more relaxed than in real life. In Stettheimer's paintings, her friends saw the selves that their younger selves had dreamed of becoming.

Half a century later, Stettheimer's work can still function as a sort of wish fulfillment for the art audience. The notables who prance around in her paintings have such a theatrical, even ethereal, relationship to their own time and place that it's possible for the downtown audience of the '90s to think of this earlier generation of New Yorkers as our contemporaries. It's pleasant to feel connected to what seems like a more intimate, less money-driven New York bohemia, and to feel that Stettheimer's characters are downtown's uptown founding mothers and fathers. One of the particular draws of Stettheimer's work is the portraits of Duchamp, who appears not as the avant-garde elder statesman who lived here in the early '60s, but as a sensuous, narcissistically handsome young man who looks more like a product of Aestheticism than a producer of Dadaism. Stettheimer's Duchamp sets the stage for our Duchamp, and in much the same way her legendary 1934 decor for *Four Saints in Three Acts*, the opera with a text by Gertrude Stein and music by Virgil Thomson, was a precipitating event in the American avant-garde theater. But perhaps before everything else, at least so far as the more discerning of post-Pop New Yorkers are concerned, there is Stettheimer's delicately ironic view of kitsch taste, what the critic Paul Rosenfeld called her "predilection for the ornamental, the frivolous, the festive," her "delight in garish, tinselly, glittering colors; the colors of 'paste' and bric-a-brac and paper flowers."

It's these connections that give what is in many respects a scholarly Whitney show about an early American modernist its urgency, its postmodern cachet. Last spring, as a sort of warm up to the Whitney retrospective, the trend-setting art adviser Jeffrey Deitch rented a space at New York's Gramercy International Contemporary Art Fair and mounted something called "The Florine Stettheimer Collapsed Time Salon." There were Stettheimer paintings, decor modeled on the

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white-and-gold-and-cellophane designs in her studio, lectures and works by contemporary artists who are glad to think of Stettheimer as The Mother of Us All. These artists include Philip Taaffe, an abstract painter who now lives in the Chelsea Hotel apartment that Stettheimer's friend and collaborator Virgil Thomson occupied for decades, and the team of McDermott and McGough, whose most remarkable work to date is a series of drawings, exhibited at Massimo Audiello in 1988, which recount their early years in New York with a panache that recalls Stettheimer's all-knowing naïveté.

This October, while the Whitney show is still on, Holly Solomon, a ringleader of downtown ebullience since Warhol days—she made her gallery the center of the Pattern-and-Decoration style in the '70s and mounted a brilliant salute to Raoul Dufy in the '80s—is spotlighting contemporary artists who want to perpetuate something of Stettheimer's decorative fantasy. Her exhibit, called "Love Flight of a Pink Candy Heart," includes work by nineteen artists and ranges from Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's room-sized *Aztec Valentine* to a pictorial quilt by Faith Ringgold.

In Stettheimer's democracy of egotists there are no bit players: everybody is a star. The artist herself takes many important roles, perhaps dressed in a daringly chic pants suit, always with the leggy, carefree look of a flapper, although by the time that the '20s roared in Stettheimer, who was born in 1871, could only maintain her youthful profile as a complicated illusion. There are self-portraits, portraits of Stettheimer with two of her sisters and her mother, and Stettheimer also appears as a sort of impresario or ringleader in her paintings of the parties at rented summer houses, where the family invited *le tout* New York for weekend lunches on the grass. At the center of Stettheimer's high bohemia was a female quartet that consisted of her mother Rosetta, a remote type in old lace who did little except play cards, and the three sisters that friends called the Stetties. Ettie published several novels, and Carrie devoted years to the construction of a dollhouse for which artists including Duchamp made scale-models of their paintings. (It is now in the Museum of the City of New York.)

The family was German-Jewish, part of a monied New York crowd that included the Guggenheims and the Seligmans. Florine's father, Joseph, left his wife and five children when they were still quite young for reasons that have never been publicly explained. The oldest daughter, Stella, married, and the son, Walter, pursued business interests out West. This left Rosetta and her three younger daughters to spend much of their time in Europe, where they had many relatives and their considerable income went a very long way. New York was just one stop on a yearly transatlantic cycle until the coming of World War I sent them back to Manhattan for good.

By the mid-'20s they were living in a huge apartment in the neo-Renaissance Alwyn Court on West 58th Street and entertaining an ever-widening circle of artist- and writer-friends. As the years went by, Florine and her sisters came to be recognized as the idiosyncratic aristocracy of a certain sector of artistic New York and had a role that was not entirely unlike that of Edith Sitwell and her brothers in London; the connection is underlined by the fact that both Florine and Edith had intense feelings for the painter Pavel Tchelitchew, who slept with men but was glad to have spinster grande dames fall in love with him. Florine kept a diary for much of her life, from which her sister Ettie unfortunately made major excisions after her death, removing passages that (it's generally assumed) would shed some light on the interpersonal tensions that underlay the family's Old World gentility.

From what survives of her diaries and letters, it's evident that although family life gave Stettheimer a subject and a setting, it also tried her patience, especially as her reputation climbed and the family didn't know how to react. Ettie, whose success as a writer was far outstripped by her sister's success as a painter, seems to have made a point of missing the premiere of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and family members had a habit of questioning art-world visitors as to whether Florine's paintings were really any good. Florine resented the long, dull summer vacations and the days devoted to caring for her ailing mother. She wanted to get back to her studio. Ettie resented the fact that almost immediately after her mother's death Florine announced her withdrawal from the family romance by taking up permanent residence in the Beaux Arts Building.

These family dynamics are not uninteresting, but if they register at all in Stettheimer's work, it's as tremors that do little more than ruffle her beguilingly artificial surfaces. This reticence may pose a problem for the scholars who write about Stettheimer in our truth-or-dare times. The organizers of the Whitney show, Elisabeth Sussman and Barbara J. Bloemink, obviously love Stettheimer—this is Sussman's second show on the subject and Bloemink's book *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* is just out from Yale—but they keep coming up against the embarrassing fact of her intractable, brittle spirit. There's an awkwardness to the recent writing about Stettheimer that may well have something to do with the writers' not knowing how to deal with a woman who made no bones about the unsatisfactoriness of a good deal of her life but felt that these difficulties had a relatively small place in her work.

Some may find it hard to understand that this artist who is often said to personify a feminine sensibility did not care to bare her soul, did not really want to be known. She went so far as to consider asking to have all her work destroyed after her death, and it's certainly to Ettie's credit that she saw that the paintings went into museums. (She also published a small volume of Florine's poems, *Crystal Flowers*—they're what Amy Lowell might have written after too many gin fizzes.) But if Stettheimer's family was not quite sure how to feel about what she had wrought, it may have been because they sensed that there was some malevolence involved in her turning her nearest and dearest into delicate caricatures that she arranged as if they were puppets or dolls. There's a heartlessly comic spirit to some of Stettheimer's work, and it may suggest a daughter's sly revenge.

For Stettheimer, as for so many artists who were working during and after World War I, the modern total theater that was Diaghilev's Ballets Russes became an essential element in twentieth-century art's battle against reality. A taste for theatrical make-believe gave emotional complexity to works as varied as Picasso's *Three Musicians* and Matisse's odalisques, and for Stettheimer, who like so many others fell in love with the flashing image of Nijinsky beyond a proscenium arch, every painting became a performance. Well before she returned permanently to America she was developing ideas for a ballet, to be called *Orphée of the Quat'z Arts*, a fantasy in which Greek gods and Latin Quarter bohemians met and danced the night away. By the time she was back in Manhattan she was thinking of a just-begun painting as an empty stage to be filled—choreographed—with figures and props. This thespian mood is often accentuated by the inclusion of proscenium-like curtains at the edges of a painting, and by the elaborate frames that she had carved to her designs. Stettheimer's color comes out of a Ballets Russes sense of theater, too; her lurid reds and yellows and oranges and purples and her use of gold give everything a hothouse, over-the-top impact.

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What keeps this unabashedly contrived world in motion and gives it a bit of elasticity and torsion is Stettheimer's feeling for wilted rococo forms. Her tendrilly, spindly figures have curiously swaying silhouettes, and they carry one through these paintings in which the droopy-petaled flowers are sometimes larger than the people and there are endless curling banners and pendants and flags and buntings and pieces of lace and twinkling stars. Stettheimer can't do a lot, but she interests a museumgoer as an artist with a serious academic training who's consciously limited her possibilities. She calculates each folkloric symmetry and simplification. And she knows exactly what she's doing when she scatters nitwitty, flighty figures almost at random across her landscapes. Since she's chosen to represent the world in a willfully limited way, her reductions have an emotional dimension. There's a melancholy about this work, and it's related to the viewer's awareness that there are possibilities that she could not or would not entertain.

The incidents in Stettheimer's paintings are varied enough to keep a museumgoer interested, but what's engaging isn't exactly the particular paintings so much as the overall feel of the Stettheimer world. She almost invariably puts brightly colored figures and objects against a white or whitish ground, so that formally the paintings pretty much all end up having the same impact. The figure peering out of one painting could be the figure taking a nap in the next one. The individual canvases aren't so much compositions as fragments of an endless Stettheimer panorama, and viewers may feel that when they've seen a few of them they've seen them all. There are exceptions, especially a portrait of the novelist Joseph Hergesheimer seated on a dainty rococo chair next to a weird chinoiserie-style side-table-with-attached-parasol. Stettheimer turns this ridiculously stylized vignette into an emotional explosion by enveloping Hergesheimer in a threateningly full-bodied outerspace of violent Prussian blue. But mostly what is in painting A could easily be in painting B. Stettheimer's dance of life unrolls like a string of extraordinarily exotic paper dolls.

Florine Stettheimer only designed for the stage once in her life, but after all the years of thinking about painting as theater she was more than prepared to go into three dimensions when Virgil Thomson invited her in the late '20s to do the sets and the costumes for *Four Saints in Three Acts*. In the long essay that Henry McBride wrote for the catalog of the Museum of Modern Art's memorial show, the longest section is devoted not to a painting but to this work for the stage, which had its world premiere at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1934. A section of the Whitney show is devoted to Carl Van Vechten's photographs of the production and Stettheimer's set and costume designs. Under the daring leadership of the now-legendary museum director A. Everett Austin Jr., Hartford had become one of the country's leading centers for the exhibition of avant-garde art as well as a world leader in the revival of interest in Baroque painting and sculpture. All of this activity made Hartford the perfect setting for the opera, an avant-garde pageant based on the lives of Spanish Baroque saints.

This was a dream collaboration between three cosmopolites who understood exactly what kind of ironic sophistication it would take to pull off such an elaborately faux-naif confection. Stettheimer's cellophane sets, which gave the stage the feeling of an ultra-chic candy box, were admired even by people who had little patience for Stein's repetitive language and Thomson's pared-down music. Stettheimer's costumes, with their broad-brimmed hats and white moiré fabrics, looked wonderful on the all-black cast that Thomson believed gave the opera an old-fashioned decorum. The painter from New York threw herself into this new kind of collaborative adventure—Frederick Ashton was the choreographer—and at moments she must have felt as if one of her paintings was coming to life. It's possible to imagine not just *Four Saints* but all the attendant hoopla of the Hartford opening as a living, breathing Stettheimer painting. The New Haven Railroad put on extra parlor cars to accommodate the opening-night visitors, and the socialite Mrs. Harrison Williams, according to Bloemink, "ordered a special dress for the occasion, which functioned as a cocktail dress for the train ride and loosened to a full-length gown for the gallery reception and opera." And there was more. "Buckminster Fuller made a grand entrance, escorting Clare Boothe and Dorothy Hale in the prototype of his Dymaxion car."

The opera, which played on Broadway after Hartford, was one of the high points of Stettheimer's career. It gave her the opportunity to work on a grand scale, and the experience flowed back into the series of summing-up paintings of Manhattan life that she began in the late '20s, at the time when she was first working with Thomson. The *Cathedrals of Broadway* (1929), a salute to the explosion of Manhattan movie palaces, turned

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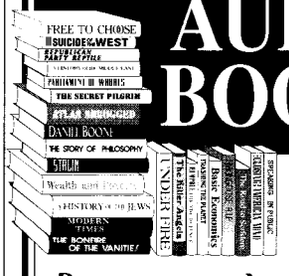

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out to be the first of four Cathedral paintings. In a way, they're *New York in Four Acts*, and, like the Stein-Thomson collaboration, they present a comically affectionate view of religious pomp. The Catholic element in the initial *Cathedrals of Broadway* may have been incidental; Stettheimer was merely pointing out that the new movie theaters were grand buildings. By the time she had painted all four canvases, however, the cathedral imagery had become part of a hagiographic project, an attempt to create a Manhattan mythology. In 1931 she painted *Cathedrals of Fifth Avenue*, which focused on the kind of society marriages that Florine and her sisters had eschewed. In *Cathedrals of Wall Street*, a 1939 picture of a Manhattan where the almighty dollar and patriotic fervor are one and the same thing, the statue of George Washington in front of the old U.S. Sub-treasury building is rendered as solid gold. And *Cathedrals of Art*, a report on the art world movers and shakers in the early '40s, was left unfinished at the time of her death in 1944.

Ettie Stettheimer gave the four *Cathedral* paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1953, and they are among the best known of Florine's works. In the *Cathedral* paintings she tells us about what's happened to New York in the decades that she's lived here: the boom and the bust, changes uptown and downtown. These are peerless documents of Art Deco Manhattan, in some respects the best that we have. And for people who are particularly interested in art in New York, the final painting is like hot gossip that's been sealed in a bottle.

Stettheimer paints Alfred H. Barr Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art, reclining in a modernist lounge chair surrounded by a cache of paintings by Picasso. She paints Francis Henry Taylor, the youthful director of the Metropolitan, taking a blond-haired baby wearing a big blue ribbon on a tour of the museum. Then there's the Whitney, with its chief benefactor, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and its director, Juliana Force. Stettheimer includes Stieglitz and McBride and A. Everett Austin Jr. from Hartford and a whole lot of other art-world folk. And, of course, she includes herself. The painting is a favorite with sophisticated museumgoers because it's about exactly the glamorous cultural atmosphere that attracted them to Manhattan in the first place. It's a logical outgrowth of Stettheimer's desire to portray herself at the center of that world, but coming at the end of the show *Cathedrals of Art* also has a Last Judgment feel, and that's somewhat unnerving. It's too big, too stiff, too contrived—an example of exactly the kind of New York overkill that Stettheimer had once set out to satirize.

In the *Cathedrals* Stettheimer reached toward a larger kind of audience and seized it, but in the process she lost that clear sense of her own limitations that had given her work its succinctness and intelligence and force. As an artist she was simply not up to these elaborately symmetrical compositions, which depend on an ability to create large movements through the subtlest manipulations of nearly static forms. The *Cathedral* paintings deal with aspects of New York life that are not exactly unfamiliar, and they are therefore also in some way thematically less engaging than a lot of her earlier work. Stettheimer's figures have lost their balletic charm; they've been reduced to saintly sticks. Although she had initially thought to call the final painting *Our Dawn of Art*, a reference to the arrival of modern art in America, what *Cathedrals of Art* really suggests is a mummified Manhattan, a group portrait to be sealed away in a tomb. By the time Stettheimer left the painting unfinished at her death, she had turned her naïveté into an article of faith.

But the ritualistic lifelessness of *Cathedrals of Art* may have satisfied Stettheimer in some deep way. This artist who'd spun paintings out of a child's dream of what a grown-up life in art would turn out to be was closing down shop. She positions herself in the lower-right corner of the painting, a mediator between the audience and the actors, who's modeled on the figure of the commère in *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Dressed in white and enveloped by a sort of white tent, Stettheimer waves to us with both hands from amid a bouquet of flowers that's like an overgrown corsage. The painting doesn't work, but that single figure does. She's a shimmering smiling vision in a silvery white flapper dress, and she does not seem sorry that this is the end. Florine Stettheimer had been the high priestess and magus of a '20s New York of her own invention, and in *Cathedrals of Art* she brings the magic to a close by wrapping a childhood fairytale around herself as if it were a shroud. •

The grim optimism of Christopher Lasch.

The Man Who Knew Too Much

By Jackson Lears

I.

Despite the ritual regard for the public intellectual in America, true independence of mind often meets misunderstanding and scorn. Consider the career of Christopher Lasch, who died last year at the age of 61, leaving behind a remarkable body of social criticism. Lasch was always provocative, occasionally mistaken and sometimes profound; but for the past decade or more, his books have provoked hostility from all sides of the intellectual and cultural wars. He has been routinely caricatured as a professional naysayer. In the academy, he is dismissed, if he is discussed at all, as a Freudian anti-feminist or a patrician antimodernist.

In such a climate of disdain, it is difficult to recapture the spell that Lasch cast over a generation of historians and cultural critics who came of age during the 1960s and 1970s. Bound galleys of his books used to circulate like *samizdat* among graduate students. His essays of the late '60s seemed to light up the whole dreary landscape of debate during the Vietnam War. In a time when public discourse was dominated by the bland horrors of "tough-minded" technoliberalism, the increasingly mindless liberationism of the New Left and the return of the diabolical clown Nixon and his retinue of thugs, Lasch was a sharp, sustaining presence in American intellectual life.

Jackson Lears is the author most recently of *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (Basic Books).

The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy
by Christopher Lasch
(W.W. Norton, 288 pp., $22)

He remained such a presence throughout the 1970s. During the latter half of that decade, Lasch turned increasingly from politics to culture. *The*

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Culture of Narcissism, which appeared in 1979, was one of those books, like *The Lonely Crowd* or *The Closing of the American Mind*, that was plucked from the shelves of "serious nonfiction" and declared to have captured the spirit of the age. Jimmy Carter (or someone on his staff) read it, and Lasch was summoned to Camp David as Carter prepared a major speech on energy policy in the summer of 1979. It became the famous, or infamous, "malaise" speech, a harsh criticism of our political culture and a call for ecologically grounded sacrifice.

It was a dour and analytical speech. The Republicans seized on its allegedly un-American tone, reminding Americans that optimism and a denial of limits were among their patriotic duties. Soon Reagan sailed to power on his lemon-twist smile and the reassurance that "America is back!" Many on the left were too depressed to speak; others retreated into identity politics and canon-smashing in the culture wars; some embraced an academic, postmodern version of Reaganism, attacking "elitism" by celebrating the emancipatory potential of American mass culture. But the criticism of concentrated power lost currency, and Lasch's fifteen minutes of fame came abruptly to an end.

Of course, it was not that simple. Lasch continued to write and to teach, continued to shape the thinking of innumerable students and readers. And yet he was in some way eclipsed. In the 1980s and 1990s, he seemed a prophet whose time had come and gone. The eclipse of Lasch was a sign not of his intellectual decline, but of the impoverishment of our public discourse. In an intellectual climate dominated by dogmas and formulas, no one knew what to make of him. From his critique of liberal "realism" in the 1960s to his embrace of Freudian psychoanalysis and Frankfurt School critical theory in the 1970s and early '80s to his turn to American populist and Protestant thought in the 1990s, Lasch stubbornly resisted doctrinaire thinking. He combined familiar traditions—liberalism, Marxism, cultural conservatism—in unfamiliar ways. He emphasized the importance of family and community, of stability, of satisfying work and religious belief; and none of this sat too well with liberals and leftists. Conservatives, on the other hand, and some liberals, too, resented Lasch's realization that the motor behind social disintegration was not "liberal permissiveness" but capitalism itself. And everyone was annoyed by his "pessimism."

Lasch's rejection of easy optimism was his most enduring intellectual trait and the one most easily misunderstood by his

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critics. What they dismissed as pessimism was really a refusal of hubris. It was certainly not an abandonment of hope. Lasch was a product of the Midwestern progressive tradition, but he brought to that tradition his own sensibilities: an appreciation of heterodox religious thinkers, an awareness of the contradictions and the limitations of all human striving, a tragic sense of life.

The idea of tragedy is easily oversimplified. We have become so accustomed to journalistic usage that we see tragedy only where there are innocent victims of forces beyond their control. We have forgotten the older, fuller meaning of tragedy, which suggests the nobility (and the necessity) of human intentions, the possibility of their fulfillment as well as their frustration. A tragic sense of life sustains hope in the face of life's limitations. An awareness of finitude does not put an end to the pursuit of happiness. Certainly Lasch's own life embodied abundant capacities for enjoyment: despite the dour portraits, friends and colleagues remember Lasch as a man of generosity and humor, a skillful gardener, carpenter and musician, an embodiment of the vernacular competence that he celebrated in his writing.

Lasch insisted on darkening the American progressive tradition, but that was his way of toughening it. He clung always to its democratic sympathies. And like E. P. Thompson, another idiosyncratic historian and critic, Lasch remained committed to universalist political values even as the postmodern celebration of "difference" made that commitment unfashionable.

Sometimes he stumbled. Lasch's gift for polemic could overwhelm his gift for analysis, and he could too easily blind himself to the shortcomings of the traditions that he admired. Like David Riesman, another acute social observer, Lasch was usually at his best when he was writing about what he knew best, the public discourse created by the professional-managerial class, and he was at his worst when he conflated that discourse with the entirety of American culture. He preferred to use his republican ideal as a weapon against his feminist and liberal critics rather than as a bridge to them. In the vehemence of his assault on liberal individualism, he sometimes threw out the baby with the bath water, submerging all talk of rights in a stern rhetoric of obligation. And his moralism made too little of pleasure.

But those who dismiss Lasch as merely a puritan and a scold ignore his restless, probing mind, his capacity for sustaining subtle argument and his humane commitments. He aspired to restore dignity to work, to rescue social discourse and social life from the tyranny of the technical, to recover the enchantment that a utilitarian and bureaucratic and therapeutic order had banished from individual and communal existence, to revivify the quality of everyday life.

II.

Lasch was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1932. His parents, as he later recalled, were Henry Wallace liberals and "militant secularists." His father, a newspaperman who fought to liberalize *The Chicago Sun-Times* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "became more and more disgusted with the hawkish wing of the Democratic Party" as the cold war intensified; and his mother was a social worker with a doctorate in philosophy, a League of Women Voters activist who later taught logic at Washington University but spent most of her time raising Lasch and his sister. Lasch grew up in the suburbs around Chicago and St. Louis surrounded by Republicans. "I enjoyed baiting them, but I would have appreciated some company," he recalled. Flaunting his atheism, he "made fun of [his neighbors'] religiosity." He felt superior but isolated.

At Harvard he encountered a wider intellectual world, which he posed playfully against the world of his parents. "I would come home from Harvard full of existentialism and neo-Thomism and other trendy subjects I knew would annoy [my mother]," he remembered. "She had a no-nonsense approach to ideas, which it took me some time to learn to appreciate." The combination of his mother's intellectual style and his father's journalistic experience probably helped to inoculate Lasch against the self-importance of intellectual life in the 1950s.

Yet the portentousness of that gloomy decade was not all posturing. There *was* a lot to furrow one's brow. In the wake of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, in the mood of crisis and helplessness fostered by the cold war, more and more Americans wondered how it was possible any longer to accept the articles of liberal faith in the beneficence of human nature and the inevitability of progress. As a graduate student in history at Columbia, Lasch was drawn to disillusioned liberals such as Lionel Trilling and Richard Hofstadter, intellectuals who were criticizing the progressive tradition from within, exposing the naïveté of its epistemology, its sentimental moralism, its confidence in the common man.

These doubts about progressivism were not only philosophical and political. In the 1950s they also found expression in the realist critique of American missionary diplomacy, the call for a "tough-minded" realpolitik approach to world affairs articulated most forcefully by Walter Lippmann and George Kennan. Lasch's first book, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, which appeared in 1962, was shaped by the realist critique. Like Lippmann and Kennan, Lasch castigated American progressives of the World War I era for their assumption that ideology dictated foreign policy, for their belief in the universal triumph of their idea of the good. These attitudes, Lasch argued, prevented them from seeing the real, profoundly illiberal nature of the Bolshevik revolution. Lasch's own view was that the revolution of October 1917 was less a triumph of Marxist ideology than an elite seizure of power.

Even before his book was published, however, Lasch was moving away from the realist position. In 1959 the Soviets shot down Francis Gary Powers in the act of airborne espionage, and the U-2 affair scuttled the summit conference planned between Eisenhower and Krushchev. For Lasch, the conference had seemed "the first break in the clouds of the Cold War." Kennan and Lippmann argued not to worry, that "summit conferences were pointless anyway"; but Lasch began to grope for a worldview that was less susceptible to cold war pressures, less enamored of elites, more willing to see democracy as a solution rather than a problem. It was at this time, he later recalled, that he "started reading people like Dwight MacDonald and William Appleman Williams, and finally the intimidating figures who stood behind them: Karl Marx and the whole Marxist tradition."

Lasch's gradual turn from realism to Marxism was less a conversion than an exploration. He always remained an outsider to the left, uneasy with clanking mechanistic schemes of social change or socialist pieties about the nobility of workers. Still, his turn to the left was real, and it had a lasting influence on his work. It instilled in Lasch an enduring contempt for the mushy formulations of mainstream social science, for its denial of class relations and its technological determinism and its celebration of a bloodless "modernization" and "industrial society." His thinking sharpened.

The first major fruit of these developments appeared in 1965, in *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963*. This was a brilliant and sustained assault on "tough-minded realism" in its many forms. Through a series of deft portraits and essays encompassing figures as diverse as Jane Addams, Randolph Bourne, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Walter Lippmann, Dwight MacDonald and Norman Mailer,

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Lasch explored the pervasive fear among intellectuals that they

> had somehow lost contact with life. To live fully, directly, spontaneously; to live to the outer limits of one's capacities; to immerse oneself in the stream of experience—all this was no longer something one took for granted as the essence of the human condition, but had become rather an objective to be strived after with all one's powers, an objective one was yet fated to fall pitiably short of.

In identifying the centrality of life-worship among the intellectuals, the cult of "real life," Lasch seized on one of the richest and most revealing themes in modern cultural history, and it became a persistent preoccupation in his own work. Later he explored the deeper origins of this dis-ease: the sense of desiccated unreality that pervaded the society that the life-worshipers sought to escape. In *The New Radicalism*, he was more interested in the practical and political consequences of the pursuit of authentic experience. What was new about the new radicals was their discovery, long before this discovery became a banality of American life, that the personal is political. "The private and the public blended imperceptibly together," Lasch wrote, "the one taking on the color of the other. Private pursuits came to seem sterile and unproductive unless invested with political meaning." (This outlook epitomized the disdain for the "merely personal" that continues to impoverish cultural politics on the left.) And politics became a means of pursuing "life."

Lasch was on to something important: the mingling of personal and political, while in many ways necessary and important, could badly muddle public discourse. "The new radicals proposed political solutions for cultural problems and cultural solutions for political problems," Lasch wrote.

> On the one hand, they proposed to improve the quality of American life by means of public administration [the agenda of Lippmann's *Drift and Mastery* (1914)]. On the other hand, they proposed to attack such public problems as the conflict between capital and labor by eliminating the psychological sources of conflict, by "educating" capitalist and laborers to a more altruistic and social point of view—in other words, by improving the quality of men's private lives.

From this implicitly masculine standpoint, politics became social engineering; therapy became public policy; expertise became the portal to power. "It fell to the new radicals in America to convert the discovery of the hidden recesses of the spirit into a program of social and political action." The result was a trivialized public discourse that obscured fundamental issues of class and power—including the ways that government by experts embodied the class interests of intellectuals themselves. The rhetoric of realism allowed intellectuals to abandon their critical roles and to accommodate themselves to power. And in the long final chapter of *The New Radicalism*, Lasch astutely traced "the anti-intellectualism of the intellectuals" from Reinhold Niebuhr's austere realism to Norman Mailer's instinctual radicalism. As the new radicals became more comfortable with wealth, they also became more preoccupied with taste and style—a tendency that reached its zenith, or rather its nadir, with the glorification of the Kennedy administration.

By example more than by precept, *The New Radicalism* held up a demanding and exhilarating ideal of mental independence. Lasch was an inspiring model of critical engagement, proof that you did not have to lose your mind or your soul to pursue an intellectual career. Lasch's own ethical stance was not always clear; he wrote admiringly of detachment without ever appearing detached himself. He seemed to stand, above all, for clarity of thought amid a cloud of murky evasions and pseudo-revolutionary slogans. It was

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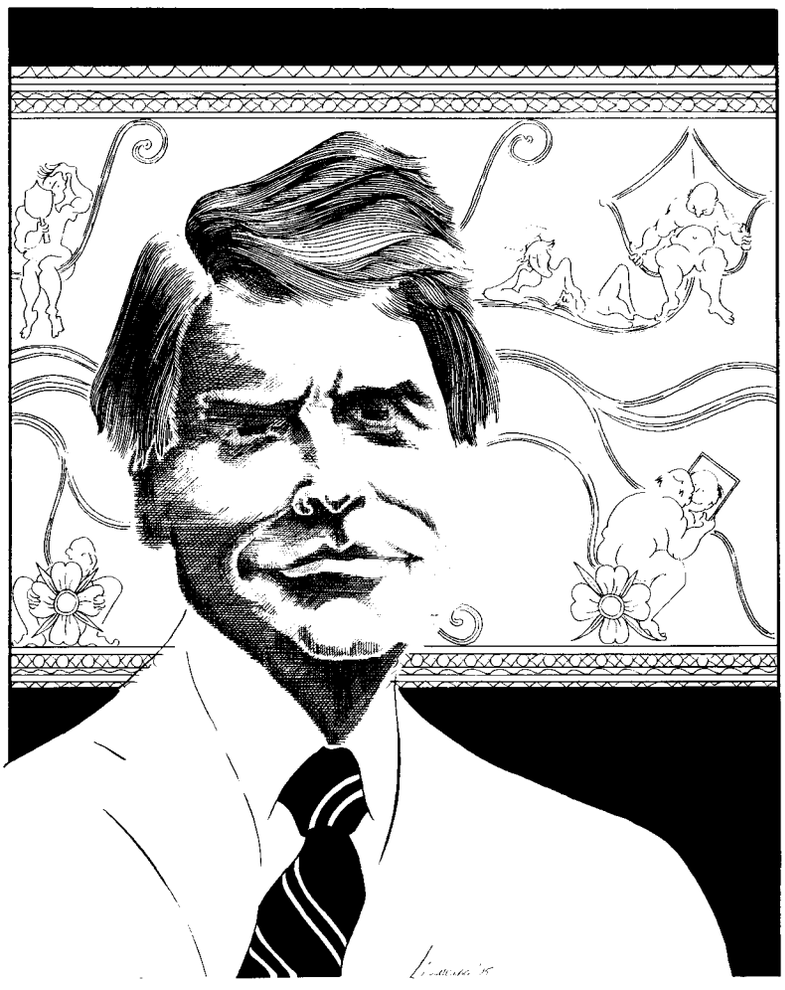
not always clear what else he stood for, but it was worth staying tuned to find out.

Events moved swiftly in those days. As the assassinations and the demonstrations multiplied, intervention in public debate seemed urgent. Lasch intervened often, usually in *The New York Review of Books*. His essays were collected in *The Agony of the American Left* (1969) and *The World of Nations* (1973). These pieces hold up surprisingly well, unlike most of the painfully dated polemics of that era. Lasch continued his probing of public discourse, but with a more pointedly political agenda. "Why do we find ourselves, in an unprecedented crisis in our history, without a program for change?" he asked, with pardonable hyperbole. The answers lay in several directions: in the assimilation of radical movements like populism and socialism, whose "objectives were redefined in such a way as to make their realization possible without any basic modification of American institutions"; in the embrace of "the war-making power and propaganda machinery of the state" by intellectuals who failed to realize that "the dream of influencing the war machine is a delusion"; and in the emptiness of free speech under the regime of technocratic expertise:

> American intellectuals are not subject to political controls but the very conditions which have brought about this result have undermined their capacity for independent thought. The American press is free, but it censors itself. The university is free, but it has purged itself of ideas.



CHRISTOPHER LASCH BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

If all this sounds a little too much like the New Left's dismissal of tolerance as a bourgeois illusion, the fact is that Lasch ardently preserved his faith in the press and the university as sites where critical thinking could be sustained. His whole career was a monument to that faith. Yet he continued to long for a vigorous public culture. Without one, politics would remain "blandly 'pragmatic' and public discussion feeble and banal, confusing class interests and private gain, seldom acknowledging publicly what people knew privately, concerning itself with portentous trivia." It would be hard to find a more succinct summary of American political culture in the last third of the twentieth century.

What was to be done? "Radicalism—socialism—is the only long-term hope," Lasch wrote in *The Agony of the American Left*. Certain things had to happen—maybe a new radical party "to introduce socialist perspectives into political debate, to create a broad consciousness of alternatives," somehow "a reawakening of the democratic instinct in middle-class Americans" who were prosperous but nevertheless felt "corrupted, degraded, and victimized" by the warfare state that underwrote their prosperity. It was about this time, the late 1960s, that Lasch was helping to organize teach-ins at the University of Iowa and trying to prevent the descent of the New Left into pseudo-revolutionary nihilism. Along with Eugene D. Genovese, Lasch aimed to occupy an independent "Western Marxist" position, advocating democracy and intellectual freedom as he dissected the oppressive cultural logic of capitalism. "It was somewhat disconcerting to find myself suddenly consorting with people who spoke Marxism as an original language and were steeped in the lore of the Left," Lasch later recalled. No matter how long Lasch "spoke Marxism," it could never be confused with his native tongue.

In *The World of Nations*, Lasch began to move beyond his Enlightenment heritage. The book was explicitly aimed at discrediting linear, progressive visions of history, and at complicating familiar philosophical categories. The essay "Is Revolution Obsolete?" explored the radicalism of tradition. Citing E.P. Thompson, Lasch noted that the most radical elements in the English working class preserved a living memory of the preindustrial village past; and citing Barrington Moore, he observed that "revolutions are set in motion not by emerging classes but by classes over whom the wheel of progress is about to roll." This was a central insight, which challenged progressive assumptions and shaped the rest of Lasch's career.

An increasing concern for continuity with the past led Lasch away from conventional politics and toward harder thinking about civil society: family and kinship networks, communities and workplaces, religious beliefs and educational practices. It was here, and not in the conventional political arena, that renewal would have to take place. But it was not long before he realized that the fascination with community could lead to a merely decorative ethnic particularism. "Ethnic eccentricities, harmless and quaint, not only contribute to our amusement but add to our flattering self-portrait of ourselves as a 'pluralistic' society," he observed, eerily envisioning much of the "multicultural" ferment of the last twenty years.

For Lasch, civil society in America had become, in 1973, a contested site of cultural struggle. Things looked bleak indeed on some fronts. "Today family life increasingly exists in a vacuum and has become vacuous," he announced, with an uncharacteristic redundancy and an increasingly characteristic indifference to evidence. Education, meanwhile, had subordinated innovative reforms to agendas for "life adjustment" and bureaucratic

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efficiency. But the central issue was work. So long as work was boring and instrumental, Lasch wrote, "so long will the educational system be geared to essentially industrial requirements." The craftsman in Lasch was beginning to come to the front. Like Ruskin and Morris, he was disturbed by "the loss of autonomy on the job, the collapse of high standards of workmanship, the pervasive demoralization" that results when people mass-produce goods they know to be worthless. "The cultural task confronting the left is not to overthrow the work ethic, which is already under attack from within capitalist society, but to invest it with new meaning." This would become the subtext for much of his social criticism.

The greater importance of *The World of Nations* was that it signaled Lasch's decisive movement away from Marxist and liberal teleologies. In seeking to undermine Whig history, in emphasizing the radicalism of tradition, in lamenting the decline of craftsmanship and dignified labor, Lasch made clear that he had rejected the pieties of progress. Most significant, perhaps, was his endorsement of Jacques Ellul's critique of technological determinism. Like Ellul, when confronted with genetic engineering and other evidence of the human drive to control all biological conditions, Lasch began to ask "is this what we want?" By questioning the illusion of complete human mastery over nature, Lasch opened up a wider range of decisions to human choice. We really could choose whether or not we wanted a particular form of technological development; we did not have to obey the imperatives of a progressive *deus ex machina.*

III.

Lasch's discontent with linear frameworks and deterministic schemes did not lead him to quit them altogether. In the 1970s he took a psychoanalytic turn that stranded him in turgid, sweeping clinical formulations. In some ways, despite his powerful criticism of therapeutic elites, he also assumed the role of "doctor to a sick society." Not that the diagnosis was altogether mistaken. His books from this period—*Haven in a Heartless World* (1977), *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), *The Minimal Self* (1984)—were all filled with shrewd, provocative observations about the nihilistic drift of a culture in which all overarching frames of meaning have collapsed, and nothing matters beyond a manipulable sense of personal well-being. Far more flexibly than Foucault, whose attack on the "helping professions" was also winning American converts about this time, Lasch dissected the baneful results of widespread dependence on expertise. But his argument emerged in an ungainly theoretical idiom, a union of Freud and Marx, that created a feeling of claustrophobia. Men and women seemed merely to be conforming to clinical patterns that had been scripted by psychoanalysts (or Marxists) before they were born.

Still, Lasch's turn toward psychoanalysis was understandable. It offered a rich tradition of thinking about contradictory motives, unintended consequences, the tangled thickets of the inner life. Especially in its Freudian versions, it reinforced the awareness of limits, the tragic sense. For Lasch it posed an alternative to what he called the "fake radicalism" of the counterculture, which became virtually an obsession for him during these years. And, finally, it offered a compelling explanation of family conflict in an era when generational and gender strife were unusually overt and intense. Nobody who lived through such struggles during that era, whatever good they may have accomplished, could characterize them glibly or deny the pain that they caused. Lasch's own pain animated his psychoanalytic books but ultimately undermined their persuasive power. There is a tormented quality to these works, almost a desperation, that could lead readers to dismiss them as jeremiads.

What really limited *Haven in a Heartless World,* though, was less old-fashioned American moralism than the totalizing tendencies of the Frankfurt School. The title was ironic, as Lasch repeatedly emphasized. "The same historical developments that have made it necessary to set up private life—the family in particular—as a refuge from the cruel world of politics and work, an emotional sanctuary, have invaded this sanctuary and subjected it to outside control," he wrote. The historical developments that he had in mind were the growth of a capitalist economy and its increasing domination by monopolistic corporations. The capitalist "war of all against all" created the need for a haven, but the bureaucratization of capitalism created the new class of therapeutic professionals and much of their constituency.

It was not always clear just who that constituency was. Lasch made a fundamental distinction (which he did not always maintain) between the educated middle class, which collaborated with and demanded experts, and the working class, which was "besieged" by them. Most of the time his argument encompassed the entire society. "The combined influences of advertising and the 'helping professions' had liberated people from old constraints only to subject them to more subtle forms of control," he announced. "These agencies freed personal life from the repressive scrutiny of church and state only to subject it to medical and psychological scrutiny or the manipulation of the advertising industry." Under the banner of spontaneity, they disenchanted erotic life and "reduced it to a routine."

This sort of sweeping and unsupported statement inevitably provoked a hostile question. How does he know? Though Lasch deftly exposed the absurdity of "nonbinding commitments" and bleak pessimism behind "cool sex," many of his own assertions stopped the reader cold. (In the 1920s, he wrote, "husbands and wives agreed to regard fidelity as an unattainable ideal.") While he skewered Talcott Parsons and Margaret Mead, he often confused the fatuities of social science with the beliefs of ordinary people. Though he attacked functionalist sociology for making everything fit, his own view of society seemed equally tidy and constraining. There was no way out.

The Culture of Narcissism evoked a less claustrophobic world, especially when Lasch concentrated on interpreting contemporary culture rather than reconstructing the narcissist's family romance. Narcissists were not pleasure- seekers (indeed, their obsession with pleasure revealed their inability to sustain it); they were people unable to see the boundaries between self and world, wandering in the hall of mirrors that was our image-saturated society. And like the new radicals of the early twentieth century, they continued to yearn to feel "real." The situation was not helped by the therapeutic approach, which shrank meaning and love to meet the individual's immediate emotional requirements, or by the mass media, which "make it more and more difficult for [the common man] to accept the banality of everyday existence." To cultivate ironic detachment, as so many intellectuals recommended, was to Lasch merely a surrender to moral and political paralysis.

He did suggest some ways out. Briefly, and unconvincingly, he evoked the old dream of a transition to socialism. But his heart was not in it. More important, Lasch underscored the importance of "loving memories," of myths and traditions of the past, in providing cultural and psychic resources for maintaining a sense of self and resisting illegitimate authority. He rejected the "fashionable sneer" of those who charged him with nostalgia. In the end, it all came back to the need for dignified work: the regeneration of "older traditions of self-help" in "communities of competence." Lasch was beginning to sound more and more like a Protestant

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moralist. Populism and localism loomed on his critical horizon. What was at stake was more than political power; it was nothing less than reality itself, or at least our capacity to experience it.

Lasch's vision of "the self" was beginning to emerge: independent but connected to a community, committed to "useful, creative work" and (his critics charged) implicitly male. Whatever its gender, there did seem to be something a little class-bound and culture-bound about Lasch's vision of the self, a little too tightly tied to the Western bourgeoisie of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and to their characteristically narrative, realist art forms. Of course, there are many things to admire in the bourgeois self (as Gertrude Himmelfarb is constantly reminding us). The difficulty resides in regarding it as a universal norm, which is what Lasch appeared to do when he counterposed it to the fragmented, fallen narcissist. Here, as elsewhere, Lasch's universalism enabled him to reject the relativizing indifference that often masks itself as tolerance, but it also allowed him to ignore the narrowness of bourgeois selfhood—and the alternatives suggested by non-Western (or even non-Protestant) traditions.

Still, many of his readers just didn't get the point. They persisted in seeing narcissism as self-love and Lasch as another prudish critic of the "Me Decade." And so Lasch wrote *The Minimal Self* to set the record straight. He was reading eclectically. He made overtures to environmentalists and feminists, proposing, in effect, the "greenish libertarian socialism" that E.P. Thompson was discussing at about the same time. He read Hannah Arendt on the need to create durable things in this world. He read D.W. Winnicott on the need for transitional objects as intermediaries between self and world—a demonstration that the self is both separate and connected. He was groping toward a position that emphasized the importance of connectedness to the material world. The quest for reality was becoming more palpable. Ultimately it led Lasch not to social engineering or to an accommodation with power (as it had the new radicals), but to a populist criticism of progress that left him increasingly isolated in the public debate.

IV.

The True and Only Heaven (1991) set forth that criticism, and it provoked a chorus of catcalls. They complained, rather predictably, of his pessimism and his distaste for technological development. Nobody likes a sad sack, certainly not Americans gripped by the resurgent technophilia of the late twentieth century. So they missed the subtleties of Lasch's position, which repudiated the linear vision of progress precisely because its fatalism "inhibits creative thought and makes it so difficult to evade the choice between fatuous optimism and debilitating nostalgia." Progressive optimism denies "any natural limits on human power and freedom, and it cannot survive for long in a world in which an awareness of those limits has become inescapable." Hope, on the other hand, "asserts the goodness of life in the face of its limits. It cannot be defeated by adversity."

Lasch aimed to plant his attack on progress on native grounds. Much of the book was an account of the tensions between liberal and republican traditions in American political thought. If liberalism sanctified free-floating individuals, republicanism embedded them in a commonwealth of small producers. The idea of commonweal, not the ideal of community, was crucial for Lasch. It was his way of reconciling a commitment to universal values with an acceptance of differing views. A commonweal implied shared public ideals and notions of civic virtue, but it left room for cultural heterogeneity as well as vigorous disagreement and debate. In this way Lasch separated his populist stance from the increasingly fashionable communitarianism of the 1980s, which in Lasch's view conjured up nostalgic visions of *gemeinschaft* and a therapeutic jargon of "caring." Commonweal vivified an ethically informed public life; community reduced it to an empty "politics of meaning."

In many ways *The True and Only Heaven* was about the rise and fall of commonweal in the United States. The heroes of the story were the labor republicans, the populists and the syndicalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who fought the good fight of the small producers against large scale industrialization. The significance of their struggle, Lasch charged, has been obscured by the progressive assumption that industrialism and democracy are somehow twinned. In fact, as Lasch made clear, defenders of democracy have often resisted centralized economic growth, realizing all along what historians have only begun to understand: that the engines of development, the modern corporation and the administrative state, require the maintenance of new, enduring hierarchies and the disempowerment of ordinary people.

For a long time the American labor movement was invigorated by a populist vision, but toward the end of the nineteenth century (Lasch thought) labor took a wrong turn. Led by Samuel Gompers, labor leaders began to define democracy not as the pursuit of civic virtue but as the universal access to abundance. Government began to be evaluated less by its capacity to sustain commonweal than by its ability to promote prosperity for individuals. Liberalism began to assume its modern shape.

Tracing the transformation of liberalism, Lasch rounded up the usual suspects: the self-anointed "civilized minority" of managerial professionals who inaugurated the reign of expertise, despised the common folk and could not see "that their own world was in many ways just as circumscribed as the worker's." What really offended Lasch about progressive thought was its disconnection from the messy realities of everyday life. Working toward the ideal of "connected criticism" articulated by Michael Walzer, Lasch railed against the abstraction and deracination of "the thinking classes." Elevating "flesh and blood love" over "vague, watery humanitarianism," he insisted that people needed a narrower circle of loyalty—the family and the neighborhood—than the brotherhood of man or the international proletariat.

The issues were becoming religious as well as political. Thus Lasch observed that the liberal theologian Harvey Cox, in celebrating *The Secular City* (1965), "ignored the possibility that ultimate loyalty to the creator of being has to be grounded in loyalty to family and friends, to a particular piece of earth, and to a particular craft or calling." Lasch remained more attached than ever to a particular, albeit capacious, cultural tradition, a compound of classical republicanism and Protestant Christianity. Their mingling became apparent when he discussed the parallels between classical civic virtue and Christian grace. "Virtue, like grace, enabled men to live undespairingly with the knowledge of finitude, the poignant contrast between the absolute and the contingent." Both virtue and grace "encouraged men and women to find order and meaning in submission to a communal standard of conduct. Both associated the good life with a particular form of community, and with the memories that constituted it." This is a peculiarly Protestant meaning of grace. There are others unmentioned by Lasch, forms of grace less attached to conscious will and communal responsibility, more akin to the unpredictable benison, the epiphany of mystical or aesthetic insight.

Despite this Protestant parochialism, however, Lasch's idiosyncratic exploration of religion had significant consequences. The most important was his dis-

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covery of "the spiritual discipline against resentment"—the young Reinhold Niebuhr's idea, which the theologian forgot during the cold war. By recognizing that "the evil in the foe is also in the self," Niebuhr argued, we renounce claims of victimhood as well as any self-righteous sense of moral superiority to our opponents and mitigate the cruelties of social conflict without pretending to abolish conflict altogether. This, according to Lasch, was the discipline that animated Martin Luther King and the early civil rights movement. He insisted that it ought to elevate contemporary public discourse above rivalrous claims to victimhood.

Unfortunately, Lasch's own argument did not often exhibit this discipline. In *Heaven*, as in his earlier work, Lasch's attack on managerial professionals continued to omit the acknowledgement that he was one of them, too. He never put himself in the picture, always claiming to stand outside the new radicalism or the culture of narcissism or the mobile managerial professionals. Yet his own career, especially in its early stages, epitomized the professional path to success: frequent moving, frequent flying, a steady progress up the academic ladder. More important, his relentlessly skeptical outlook personified the culture of critical discourse developed by academic professionals in the twentieth century.

Lasch's preference for the spontaneous and the vital led him to the lower orders, as it had the new radicals before him. The weakest part of *Heaven* was its leap from an anti-progressive intellectual tradition to the class that supposedly embodied it in the twentieth century, the petite bourgeoisie. This strategy required Lasch to overlook the pervasiveness of belief in progress among small businessmen, and the persistent tendency of this class to foster a mean-spirited politics of resentment. It also demanded that he identify one class or group as the sole bearers of political virtue—precisely the sort of notion for which he had castigated Marxists and leftists. Implicitly disowning his antiwar past, he sentimentalized nationalism as connectedness and overlooked its more poisonous possibilities. Rejecting liberal caricatures of working-class authoritarianism, he nearly severed his attachments to his own libertarian past.

V.

The same problems bedevil Lasch's posthumously published book, *The Revolt of the Elites*, the same morality play pitting the virtuous petit-bourgeois folk against the shape-shifting intelligentsia, now appearing as the "symbolic analysts" made fashionable by Robert Reich. The folk work hard, play by the rules and get nowhere fast. The symbolic analysts, in contrast, have ensconced themselves in luxurious hyper-reality. "In their drive to insulate themselves against risk and contingency," Lasch charged, "the thinking classes have seceded not just from the common world around them but from reality itself." Yet somehow they manage to pursue a "glamourous, gaudy, sometimes indecently lavish way of life."

All of this may well be true, but it is a little cartoonish. Lasch's censorious impulses created problems for his argument. He was understandably impatient with the empty ideal of "openness" that prevails in the academic culture of the humanities (if nowhere else); he insisted that values demanded defense as impersonal principles and not just as personal preferences. Yet his moralism narrowed his conception of limits—and his conception of culture, too. "Culture is a set of moral demands," he wrote. "Sooner or later our remissive elites will have to rediscover the principle of limitation." Is that really all that culture is? Sometimes the attribution was less precise: "We have become far too accommodating and tolerant for our own good," Lasch warned. (The pronoun referred, of course, to the educated professionals with whom he consorted.)

Granting that tolerance can become a handy excuse for indifferent educators or distracted parents, Lasch's warning still makes me wonder if we lived on the same planet. Reading Lasch on the danger of excessive tolerance, you would never know that in many parts of the world demagogues are enlisting ethnic, religious and nationalistic resentment in their efforts to exterminate whole populations; or that in the United States police powers are being dramatically expanded while spokesmen for defendants' rights have virtually disappeared. The country seems gripped by a desire for vengeance. None of this is meant to deny the legitimate fear and anger of people who live with crime. It is only to say what ought to be obvious: excessive tolerance is hardly an adequate diagnosis for all our social ills.

Yet Lasch's moralistic stance was offset by his vitalist impulses. And this saves his book. His yearning to connect with "real life," coupled with the larger religious framework he was developing, make *The Revolt of the Elites* more than just a jeremiad. So do the circumstances under which it was written. Lasch had reason to ponder limits more profound than moral strictures and to long for "real life": he was dying of cancer. All his references to "the contingency and finitude of human life" were freighted with that knowledge. The connected critic was connected, before all else, to his body. Its decay was the ultimate testimony to the "intractability of limits."

In Lasch's case, then, the talk of limits was not merely moralism. Along with censoriousness there is also heroic affirmation in *The Revolt of the Elites*. Far from advocating a return to "the patriarchal family," Lasch made humane proposals to protect family life in any form—to limit market forces, to redefine success, to loosen up career patterns, to restructure the workplace. The desire for connectedness also led him out of the family toward an appreciation of "the great good place," the neighborhood bar, coffee shop or other hangout, as a revivifying alternative to family and workplace.

What redeems his last book most convincingly, though, is Lasch's anti-absolutist discussion of religious belief as an alternative to the dominant culture of technological mastery. The belief in question is Protestant in sensibility if not in theology, but the discussion speaks, I believe, to people outside Protestant, Christian or even theistic traditions. Religion cannot be dismissed, wrote Lasch, as "a set of comprehensive and unambiguous answers to ethical questions." Rather, he claimed, it "encourages believers at every step to question their own motives." This made belief a burden rather than a self-righteous claim to moral superiority. "The spiritual discipline against self-righteousness is the very essence of religion." Citing Jonathan Edwards as an authority, Lasch

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contemplated "a God who does not regard human happiness as the be-all and end-all of creation," and considered a "central paradox of religious faith: that the secret of happiness lies in renouncing the right to be happy."

Lasch raised many important questions in the course of his career. Some of these cannot be answered quickly. The recognition of limits, for example, is too often conflated by Lasch with the necessity of moral constraints. Some limits are cultural constructions ("the deficit" comes to mind) that reflect the needs and the interests of particular groups. What is presented as inexorable turns out to be negotiable; an alleged fact of economic or biological life can be redefined through political debate. Some limits are deconstructible ("woman's place") or transformable ("unnatural acts"). Some are inexorable, such as the amount of undeveloped green space or fossil fuel on the earth, the process of aging, death.

Which limits should we try to evade or transcend? Which should we accept and honor? However those questions are debated, the largest point is the one that Lasch never made sharply enough: an emphasis on limits does not require a rejection of human pleasure. Resistance to economic development might well promote a way of life more sensuously and aesthetically satisfying than the frantic pursuit of "growth" that we are encouraged to equate with enjoyment. This was not an idea to which Lasch would have been very hospitable; and yet, despite the narrowness of his notion of limits, we are in his debt for reopening the subject after a decade of denial.

He was an American original: an eighteenth-century pamphleteer, a nineteenth-century moralist, a twentieth-century public intellectual. What Christopher Lasch said of Randolph Bourne could be said of himself: "A lonely protest which carried the ring of truth might in the long run count for more than the self-justification of men who were determined at all costs to hold on to their influence." Or so we can hope. Yet the loneliness of Lasch was owed not merely to his independent mind and his cantankerous style. It stemmed also from the dogmatic character of our public culture—a culture that is unable to acknowledge genuinely idiosyncratic thinkers, that is more comfortable pasting labels on them than trying to understand their work. But Lasch's story is not over. There is still nourishment to be had from his ideas. He was one of the most original and courageous thinkers in the history of American social thought. Peace to his embattled spirit. •

Balance in the Earth

BY ALAN BRINKLEY

But Is It True? A Citizen's Guide to Environmental Health and Safety Issues by Aaron Wildavsky

(Harvard University Press, 574 pp., $35)

A Moment on the Earth: The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism by Gregg Easterbrook

(Viking, 745 pp., $27.95)

The New Ecological Order by Luc Ferry translated by Carol Volk

(University of Chicago Press, 190 pp., $34.95)

The conservative tide, which has been successfully assaulting almost every other American reform movement for fifteen years, has finally caught up with environmentalism. Industry lobbyists sit on Capitol Hill rewriting environmental legislation. Crudely drafted bills move through the House gutting appropriations for the Environmental Protection Agency and requiring government to weigh all new environmental regulations against economic cost, a likely route to endless litigation and paralysis. Popular culture may still revel in environmental correctness, as Disney's *Pocohontas* makes clear, but in the real world of politics and law the American greens are on the defensive.

The political assaults are, for the most part, from ancient enemies of environmentalism acting out of economic self-interest or ideological rigidity. But the same cannot be said for another emerging body of criticism: a series of reassessments by a group of respected academics and journalists who are challenging much conventional environmental wisdom and calling into question some of the movement's most important claims. These writers are generally liberal, with a basic sympathy toward at least some forms of environmental activism, but they have lost patience with what they believe are the inflated claims and extremist values of much of the environmental establishment. Important new books by Aaron Wildavsky, Gregg Easterbrook and Luc Ferry give us a revealing glimpse of (to paraphrase Easterbrook) the coming age of environmental skepticism.

Aaron Wildavsky was a renowned political scientist at Berkeley until his death in 1993 and one of the most prolific scholars of his generation. (*But Is It True?* is the first of several manuscripts to be published posthumously.) His challenging examination of dozens of contemporary environmental controversies has two purposes. One is to help Americans understand the obligations of citizenship. We are bombarded, Wildavsky contends, with scientific studies and theories that become a spur to public action, but few of us feel competent to evaluate the claims and counterclaims swirling around us. Unable to make informed decisions ourselves, we leave the decisionmaking to others.

In an effort to find a solution to this dilemma, Wildavsky recruited a group of undergraduates and graduate students, none of them scientists, and supervised a broad-ranging inquiry into the scientific claims that support a broad range of environmental initiatives. He wanted to see if untrained people like himself and his students could decipher the evidence and learn to answer a simple question: "But is it true?" And he discovered that they could indeed answer the question, though not without considerable effort. His hope (implausible as it may seem) is that their example will embolden many other Americans to empower themselves as citizens by attempting to understand and to evaluate the claims of science and technology.

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Wildavsky's second purpose is more controversial (and less explicitly stated). In a series of books and articles, Wildavsky has raised questions about the ways in which we calculate risk in modern society. He argues that we should not make costly and disruptive policy decisions to avoid risk unless there is clear evidence that risk exists. But too often we do exactly that. Almost all the case studies in this book involve health and environmental issues that have generated a strong policy response even though, Wildavsky argues, there has seldom been proof of real danger. In some cases, in fact, there has been overwhelming evidence that the dangers do not exist.

Wildavsky and his students sifted methodically through mountains of difficult scientific studies and have presented their conclusions in reasonably clear prose. Their conclusions are stark and provocative. In reviewing dozens of health and safety controversies of the last few decades, they find none that appears nearly as serious as environmentalists have claimed. Some are familiar examples of overreaction, widely cited by critics of environmentalism: the cranberry scare of 1959, the controversy about Alar on apples in 1989. But others are widely publicized environmental horror stories that few people have publicly questioned. These are a few of Wildavsky's more provocative claims:

- The ban on DDT, one of the first great triumphs of modern environmentalism (and a tribute to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*), did "more harm than good."
- Despite the hysterical fears of parents, asbestos in schools poses no detectable danger to children.
- There is no evidence that acid rain poses significant danger to the environment except in a few isolated places (such as some high-altitude forests).
- Most hazardous waste sites (including such notorious ones as Love Canal in upstate New York and Times Beach in Missouri) posed no significant danger to residents. The government's extraordinarily costly Superfund program for cleaning up such sites is, on the whole, a waste of money.
- There is no credible evidence to support fears of global warming.

The only issue on which Wildavsky cedes any points to environmentalists is the controversy over chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are widely believed to deplete the ozone layer. Wildavsky concludes that "unrestrained growth in CFC emissions is clearly unwise," and he grudgingly applauds recent progress in limiting their production. But he also notes that "there is no clear evidence of global ozone depletion," that there is good reason to believe that what depletion there may have been has nothing to do with CFCs and that there are "strong indications that the harm from [ozone] depletion will vary from little to none."

On the surface, at least, Wildavsky's arguments are purely empirical. Like almost all empirical arguments, however, they rest also on philosophical premises and subjective beliefs. To Wildavsky, the fundamental flaw in environmentalism is its absolutism—its unreflective assumption that its claims, its values, its fears are superior to all others. "What norm states that health is the only value or even the dominant value?" he asks. "Whatever happened to other values? How much is a marginal gain in health worth compared with losses in other values such as freedom, justice, and excellence?"

Wildavsky proposes a different standard for evaluating health and safety issues: replace the possibility of harm with the probability of harm as "a criterion for regulation"; reject the prevailing and insupportable assumption that "any chemical harmful at high doses is harmful at exceedingly low doses" and focus on "strong causes with palpable effects" (like cigarette smoking). The web of economic and behavioral restraints that environmentalism has begun to impose on our lives imposes costs on us. We should not be asked to bear those costs on the basis of vague possibilities and inchoate fears. "The truth value of the environmental-cum-safety issues of our time is exceedingly low," he concludes. He calls for a higher standard.

In some respects, the arguments in Gregg Easterbrook's book are strikingly similar. Easterbrook is a journalist who has written widely on environmental issues for years and he, too, expresses a broad skepticism about the claims and the alarmism of many environmentalists (including many of the claims and alarms that Wildavsky debunks). But much more than Wildavsky, he combines those challenges with an impassioned environmental ethic of his own. Easterbrook's book is smoothly and vividly written, based on extensive (if sometimes largely anecdotal) research and often highly persuasive. It is also exceptionally long, a reflection of its almost encyclopedic range.

Easterbrook's argument proceeds along several lines. In the first section of his book, he challenges two claims of modern environmentalism: that the damage that humans do to nature is fundamentally different from the damage nature does to itself; and that much of that damage is permanent and irreparable. Looking back across the millennia, Easterbrook claims, it is difficult to take such claims seriously. Nature has consistently altered itself much more dramatically than the feeble efforts of humans could possibly do; and the environment has consistently recovered from most human (and much natural) alteration with surprising speed and completeness. One of his examples from contemporary ecology is the quick and virtually total recovery of Prince William Sound in Alaska from the Exxon Valdez oil spill—a rebuke to environmentalists who claimed that the damage to the environment was permanent.

More central to Easterbrook's argument (at least if length is any indication) is the second part of his book, in which he argues passionately not only that many environmental warnings are unjustified (an argument much like Wildavsky's) but also that we have not taken enough note of the tremendous progress already made in solving real environmental problems. The progress of the last twenty years in repairing the damage that we have done to the natural world is one of the great triumphs of democratic liberalism and modern government. Our air and water are cleaner than they have been in a century; our wildlife is better protected; our food supplies are safer and more secure. Environmentalists have done themselves a disservice in downplaying successes and emphasizing failures. Recognizing the real achievements of the movement would do more to strengthen its claims (and to challenge right-wing charges that government can do nothing right) than the mindless alarmism that dominates environmentalist rhetoric.

Easterbrook's ultimate aim is larger than displaying the flaws of contemporary environmentalism. His book is suffused with an almost evangelical optimism about the importance of the "good news" that he is bringing. For we are, he claims, about to enter a new age, an age of environmental optimism. Soon, he predicts, we will recognize the success of our effort to manage our relationship with nature, and so we will regain confidence in our ability to manage the problems of mankind. The flawed "doomsday" character of contemporary environmentalism will give way to a new approach that he calls "eco-realism," through which logic and hard-headed realism will replace emotion in our approach to environmental issues. We will recognize that "nature is not ending, nor is human damage to

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the environment 'unprecedented.'" And perhaps most of all, we will understand that "the fundamental force of nature is not a moral struggle between hunter and hunted" (that is, between humans and the natural world), but "cooperation and coexistence." Nature will, therefore, "soon be viewed again in the way it was by the thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment—as a trove of wisdom and an exemplar for society."

Environmentalism is not just a movement and not just an approach to public policy. It is, in some of its forms, also a philosophy, with powerful and controversial ethical claims. Whether those claims can withstand rational scrutiny is a question that the French philosopher Luc Ferry confronts in his powerful and provocative book, which was published in France in 1993. (It has now been capably—if somewhat stiffly—translated into English by Carol Volk.)

Ferry has no quarrel with mainstream, liberal environmentalism. He seems, in fact, rather more sympathetic to it, and more credulous of its claims, than either Wildavsky or Easterbrook. His quarrel is with the more radical forms environmental thinking has begun to assume, and with the challenge some environmentalists have begun to raise to the most basic assumption of modern, secular society: that the purpose of social action is to better the life of mankind. What if man is not, as most humans have long believed, more deserving of respect and protection than animals or trees? What if we were to redefine our conception of the world so that we accept that we owe as much to nature as we do to one another?

Ferry responds to these questions by challenging two of the radical impulses that environmentalism has recently spawned: the animal rights movement and "deep ecology." These newer phenomena, he argues, challenge much more than the rights of capital or the excesses of the bourgeois lifestyle. They challenge humanism itself.

Ferry has an unerring eye for the weakest points in the philosophical arguments of his targets and he exploits them mercilessly. Animal rights advocates do not err in opposing unnecessary cruelty to animals, he insists. But when they begin to claim, as many of them do, that there is no essential difference between animal rights and human rights, they cross the boundary between a decent respect for suffering and a repudiation of centuries of intellectual tradition. Deep ecologists are correct in trying to limit man's ravaging of the natural world, he claims. But when they argue, as they increasingly do, that trees and other living vegetation are entitled to moral and legal rights apart from their value to human existence and that humans must alter the way they live to avoid abridging those rights, they are moving from the sensible to the absurd. To make these connections, Ferry insists, is to separate the notion of rights from what gives rights meaning: the idea of conscious choice.

This is the heart of the humanistic tradition: the idea that humans are different from animals because they can choose the way they live their lives. The animal, Rousseau wrote in the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, one of modern humanism's founding texts, is "an ingenious machine" that "chooses or rejects by instinct." But the "human machine" chooses or rejects "by an act of freedom" and can deviate from instinct "often to his detriment.... Thus dissolute men abandon themselves to excesses which cause them fever and death, because the mind depraves the senses and because the will still speaks when nature is silent." What makes us human, then, is that our lives are not predetermined, that we are constrained but not imprisoned by our instincts, that we can triumph or err by our own choice. The ability to choose is the foundation of our notion of rights. To argue that animals and trees have rights in any way comparable to those of humans is to rob rights of any rational basis.

Radical environmentalists, Ferry argues, are not principally concerned with nature in any case. They have seized upon environmentalism as a vehicle for expressing their own deep hostility to the structure of the modern world—their loathing of industrialism, capitalism, consumerism. Environmentalism has taken the place of the faded passions of earlier moments in the twentieth century, fascism, Stalinism, Maoism; but it is in some ways no less dangerous than these earlier fanaticisms—and it is not entirely separate from them.

Ferry takes note of an apparent irony that is also developed brilliantly by Simon Schama in his remarkable *Landscape and Memory*: that Nazi Germany had one of the most advanced environmental policies of any modern state. The Nazis' reasoning, he suggests, was not entirely different from that of today's deep ecologists. The Nazis believed that the essence of the German nation resided in a pure past, embedded in the country's physical landscape. Radical ecologists believe, equally strongly, that there is an earlier, Edenic moment in natural history that the modern world has irreparably damaged. Given their way, he warns, deep ecologists would, like their totalitarian forebears, sweep most democratic institutions aside in the name of a purer, higher cause. Their program would, if successful, lead

Adonis All Male Revue, November 24

The sign asserts itself as you haven't for months. Ancient,
a few bulbs gone, the strip lights tangle and shirr behind

the rainy window of your taxi, which waits for the signal;
women are running against the traffic. Already the day

has sharpened into a bright sordid night, already you should
have been home for dinner at the glass-topped table, staring

down at your unbodied feet. You would give almost anything
you own to throw the cab door wide, pay the three-fifty

that the posters prescribe, and sit down in the front row
of the Adonis All Male Revue. Perched on a chair near the stage,

Venus is pausing, too; she has hidden her hair, her eyes beneath
a scarf patterned in anemone petals. There is a tattered question

phrased around her face, inquiring after all the anonymity onstage
that bears his name. Hard now, to recall specific desire and its elision:

for weeks she has waited to catch a single feature beneath the lights,
nursed a single drink, and all the time a weird wind has been blowing

across forty-second street, riffling the garbage. Outside, a pair of swans
rustles and worries on their tether while the time on the meter ticks away.

MELANIE REHAK

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o a new kind of authoritarianism no ess dangerous than earlier forms.

Wildavsky, Easterbrook and Ferry are ıll, to varying degrees, sympathetic to he movement that they are challeng- ng. None of them, however, is entirely 'air to it. Wildavsky's studied tone of scientific neutrality creates an image of lisinterestedness, but the examples that ıe chooses to explore, central as they ıave been to the environmental agenda, ıre selective. A more balanced view of he record of the environmental move- nent would have included, in addition o Wildavsky's dreary chronicle of ex- ıggerated claims and wasted effort, at least a passing acknowledgment of the movement's genuine achievements and of the real problems that remain unad- dressed. (He is silent on issues involving air and water pollution, whose dangers are irrefutable and on which, as Easter- brook makes clear, the environmental movement has had a dramatic impact.)

Easterbrook's long, sunny chronicle of environmental triumphs, and his scorn- ful dismissal of doomsayers who will not acknowledge their own successes, would similarly have been more persuasive if he had been more willing to concede the possibility that environmentalists are cor- rectly alarmed about at least some un- solved problems (say, the increasing dan- gers facing oceans). And Ferry character- izes only the radicals. He, too, has chosen his examples selectively and has portrayed both the animal rights move- ment and deep ecology movement as being somewhat more consistent (and consistently extreme) than they actually are.

Still, the cumulative effect of these important books is to raise a powerful challenge to modern environmental orthodoxy. It is a challenge that re- quires particular attention today. The crisis of governance in the United States, as in much of the Western world, is not, as many claim, solely or even primarily the result of the failures of liberals and the left; and yet those failures are real, and they reinforce, if they are left un- addressed, the arguments of those who are attempting to dismantle the public world and entrust our fate to the numi- nous workings of the market. Protecting the environment, in fact, is one of the things that the market does least well, one of the things for which government intervention is most important. And so environmentalists have more to lose from the discrediting of the state than many other interest groups and much to fear from this moment of special danger to the survival of an effective govern- ment.

Many environmentalists are among the most determinedly uncompromising of all activists; and, despite the contempt with which these writers describe their tactics, that alarmism has been responsi- ble for considerable achievements. But that is not the end of the matter. No movement can survive forever without finding some accommodation with the real world of politics. Environmentalism has reached a point where it must defend its claims against well-meaning and ill- meaning critics; and it must defend its claims on the basis of evidence and ratio- nal argument. Emotion will no longer persuade anybody. So far, at least, the movement has had relatively little success in establishing a defensible, moderate center that it can differentiate from its extremes. The excesses of the radicals threaten to discredit the movement as a whole.

The modern concept of ecology—the idea of the "seamless web" of the natu- ral world and the interdependence of all species—is relatively new to human thinking about nature. In the United States, at least, it received one of its first clear expressions less than half a century ago from Aldo Leopold, whose *The Sand County Almanac*, which ap- peared in 1949, remains one of the central texts of contemporary environ- mentalism. Leopold proposed some- thing that seemed startling by the stan- dards of his time: a new philosophical approach to nature that he called the "land ethic," through which humans would learn to respect their obligations to the natural world in the same way they respect obligations to society. Per- haps unintentionally, however, he also suggested something of the dangers that now confront the great movement he helped create. "The evolution of a land ethic is an intellectual as well as an emotional process," he wrote at the end of *The Sand County Almanac*. "Conser- vation is paved with good intentions which prove to be futile, or even dan- gerous, because they are devoid of criti- cal understanding either of the land, or of economic land-use." Many modern environmentalists revere Leopold for his emotional commitment to the natu- ral world. In today's political world—as Wildavsky, Easterbrook and Ferry in their different ways suggest—they could also profit from his call for an "intellec- tual" process based on "critical under- standing."

ALAN BRINKLEY is a professor of Ameri- can history at Columbia University and the author of *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (Knopf).

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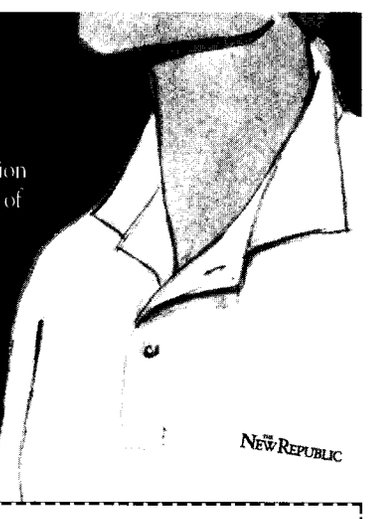

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MOSCOW DIARIST

Special deliveries

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SPEND A long time in Moscow, where I was for a month with my family this summer, to discover how bracing, quite literally, the juxtaposition of old and new ways can be. The legacy of the Soviet order is everywhere, even in the shower. Because the hot-water pipes serving our neighborhood (that's Bolshevik centralization for you) were turned off for several weeks of cleaning, we shivered as we scrubbed. But within the first week we'd also availed ourselves of a first-world delivery system the Communists never dreamed of: we ordered out for pizza. The new Russia, it turns out, isn't scrimping as it embraces the middle-class luxuries the Western world takes for granted. We had only to call Jack's with an order, and a delicious pie arrived, exactly on schedule (a feat, given Moscow traffic)—and, transported in a deluxe insulated case familiar from home, it was still warm. Another order from Jack's (we were serious students of Russian economic reform) established just how streamlined the operation was. This time when we called and gave our phone number, Jack's cheerful employee rattled off our name and address. Would that, he inquired, be another "pizza rusticana"?

IT'S NO WONDER, GIVEN HOW many manpower years the country has wasted standing in line, that the take-out concept, along with fast food, is one of the more popular capitalist specialties in Russia right now. I left just before the opening of Russkoye Bistro, Moscow's native answer to McDonald's. But no one could miss the indigenous version of on-the-go convenience, which is a world away from Westernized Jack's—and which is based, ironically, on precisely the national habit of queuing. Everywhere—outside subway stations, in underground pedestrian passageways, along major thoroughfares, near big parks—there are long lines of old women, their kerchiefs dusty and their slippers battered, offering merchandise to busy Muscovites. No need to spend time in a store shopping; someone else has done the selecting, or the scrounging, for you. The item is available right there on your way home, held out by a weatherbeaten arm—a box of cigarettes, a beribboned hat, a loaf of bread, a bit of mending tape, a bottle of vodka, a dress on a hanger, a bucket of sour cream, a slab of meat. I'd heard and read about such lines, and they sounded, and at first glance looked, a little dispiriting. The mode of these entrepreneurs seemed so primitive and impassive—no Jack's-style alacrity on display here. Then again, there was such unexpected abundance, such incongruous variety (bras next to icons, say) and such implausible conjunctions of supply and demand: the single pair of long, narrow green shoes actually fit a passerby! Soon we were eagerly keeping an ear out for the sound of our favorite commodity: kittens. Where other products were dangled with dispassion, these fluffy items were generally curled on a tasselled pillow or, better yet, on an ample shelf of Russian bosom. And the mewing, on a long, bright summer day in Moscow, sounded sweet and hopeful.

IN SEARCH OF HISTORical perspective on the current entrepreneurial bustle, I wanted to visit the Exhibition of Economic Achievements of the USSR, known by its Russian initials as VDNKh. For a shrine to the old system, nothing promised to match this 545-acre park. It was built on the site of the 1939 "All-Union Agricultural Exhibition," which had celebrated, of all things, the fruits of ten years of collectivized farming (such as that unparalleled achievement in Ukraine, a Holocaust-scale famine). And my guidebooks were breathless about the updating that had followed over the years. I was primed for a spectacular Soviet curiosity: eighty pavilions commemorating a panoply of great strides forward, gigantic statuary in the best socialist realist style and fabulous gilt fountains. The kids couldn't wait to see the Space Obelisk (a 300-foot-high titanium monument) and the Kosmos Pavilion (with a replica of Yuri Gagarin's spaceship, the Vostok, out front and Sputnik inside). And they were eager to admire prize animal specimens, too, even though the agricultural highlights of VDNKh were not recommended for summer: the stench, like everything else in the place, was reported to be prodigious.

THE GOLDEN MAIDENS WHO circle the Friendship of Peoples Fountain—each representing a different republic of the USSR—were as dazzling as advertised. The tractor driver on the triumphal entry arch was, we all agreed, awesome. But otherwise VDNKh has been, well, updated. It has become the bombastic site of a bargain hunter's mall, the place where Muscovites go to get the best prices on tape decks, CD players, cameras, computers, TVs, refrigerators, washing machines, you name it (all imported, of course). There's not a hint of goat in the air, and the size of the statues' muscles has been all but eclipsed by the size of the shoppers' bundles. Still, we kept our eyes on the Vostok's nose pointing skyward in the distance, guiding us to the Kosmos Pavilion at the far end of the park. There we found not only the rocket, but also two Aeroflot planes parked in front, one of which was open for inspection. We hurried up the steps to take a look—and found a makeshift Indian restaurant doing a brisk business inside. In the hangar-style pavilion where Sputnik was supposed to be featured, there was a cavernous showroom of Ford Explorers, a Range Rover or two, some Jeeps, Tauruses and more. At the back, in the dimness, I could see a few space capsules crowded next to the used cars. But nobody had eyes for much other than the Crown Victorias.

THE HABIT OF LOOKING EVERYwhere for telling metaphors for Russia's metamorphosis was unshakeable. And, naturally, I kept finding them. When we went to the Moscow Zoo for our whiff of animals, we were nearly trampled by a herd of ponies stampeding across a pedestrian path, zookeepers yelling and brandishing sticks in pursuit—and I marveled that I'd stumbled on the great Gogolian cliché for Russia's careening style of development. And then a much more original symbol presented itself: to the surprise of everybody at the city zoo, one of the elephants gave birth. Such unmonitored procreation is unimaginable in an American "wildlife habitat," but it's easy to see how such a thing could happen in Moscow, where the main event at the zoo isn't animals right now. (If it ever was: the monkeys we saw swigging orange soda looked like they'd been doing it for decades.) It's construction vehicles—cranes and bulldozers, etc. The place, like much of the city, is in the midst of chaotic renovation. So a huge elephant could easily bulge a bit without anybody noticing, or bothering to make much of the swelling—just as signs of rebirth in huge Russia are easy to miss or misread. And when change is happening on this scale, there's room for extraordinarily large astonishments: out of nowhere, hundreds of pounds of baby elephant.

ANN HULBERT

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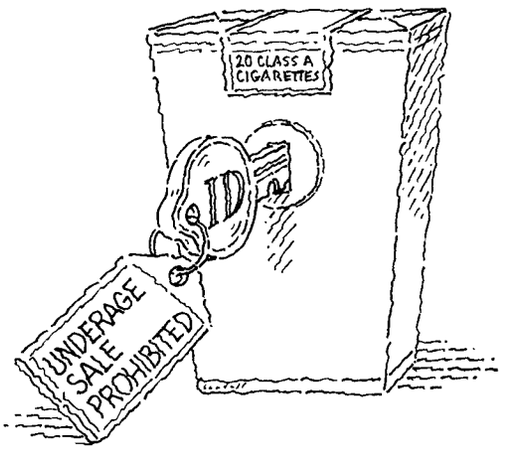

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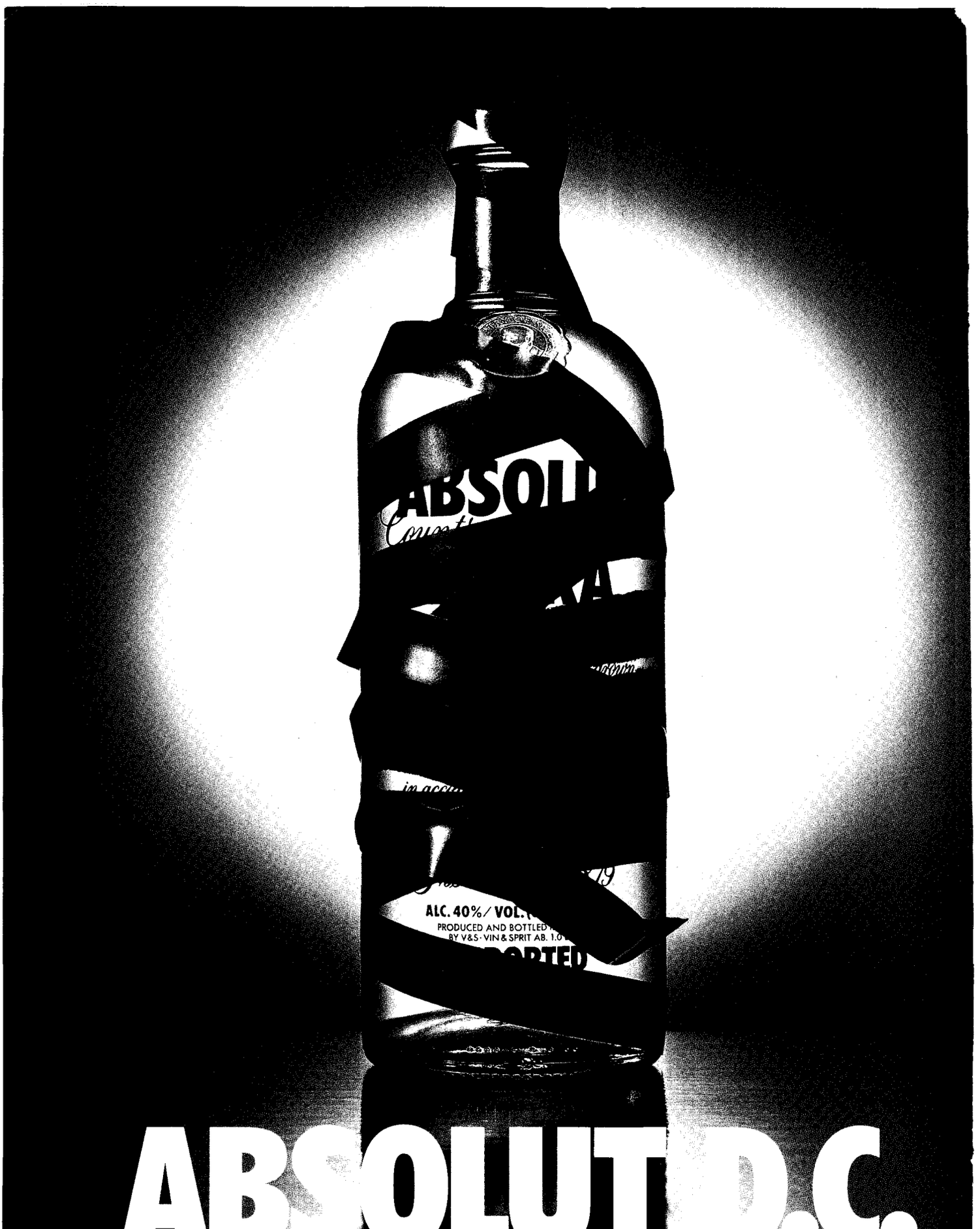

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